

FIFTEEN COMPLETE CRIME MYSTERY STORIES

15¢

MAR.

POPULAR DETECTIVE

**15
COMPLETE
STORIES**

**A THRILLING
PUBLICATION**

RAFFLES AND THE DEATH ROCKET

**A New Gentlem
Cracksman Novel
By BARRY PEROWNE**

BLOOD MONEY

**A G-Man Novelette
By JAMES
DUNCAN**

**AND
12 OTHER
GRIPPING
MYSTERIES
By
POPULAR
AUTHORS**

NARCOTIC MAN

**An Action Novelette
By FREDERICK C. PAINTON**





**"THE FIRST GIRL I EVER
LIKED — and these
Pimples had to
come!"**

**But it
wasn't
too late,
Ben
found, to
mend the
trouble**

I THOUGHT YOU AND THAT
NICE NEW BABS GIRL NEXT
DOOR WERE GOING TO BE
FRIENDS — WHAT
HAPPENED?

DON'T BE FOOLISH, MOM.
GUESS I'LL TAKE THIS
MAGAZINE UP TO MY
ROOM AND READ!

MOM MUST BE BLIND.
I WISH BABS WAS —
I WISH THESE PIMPLES
WERE INVISIBLE!
I WISH I'D KNOWN
BAB'S BEFORE —

YOUR MOTHER SAID TO
COME UP — WELL FOR THE
LUVVA — ADMIRING YOUR
MAP MISS
AMERICA
???

OH, SHUT UP! I WAS
JUST COUNTING THESE
PIMPLES, BLAST'EM!!

DOES SEEM TO BE A LOT OF 'EM —
SAY, YOU KNOW MY COUSIN RAY — HE
TOOK FLEISCHMANN'S YEAST
FOR HIS PIMPLES —
WIPED 'EM RIGHT
OFF THE OLD PHIZ

FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST DID THAT?
SAY, LEAD
ME TO
IT!

LATER

GOSH, I'M
GLAD I GOT
RID OF THOSE
PIMPLES!

BABS, GO TO
THE SCHOOL
DANCE WITH
ME NEXT
SATURDAY?

WHY, I SORT OF HAD
A DATE, BUT —
YES, I'D LOVE TO!

**Don't let adolescent pimples
make YOU hide away!**

Between the ages 13 and 25, important glands develop. This causes disturbances throughout the body. Waste poisons in the blood irritate the skin, causing pimples.

In treating adolescent pimples, doctors prescribe Fleischmann's Yeast. This fresh yeast clears the blood of skin irritants that cause pimples. Then the pimples disappear. Eat Fleischmann's Yeast 3 times a day, before meals, until skin clears.



—clears the skin
**by clearing skin irritants
out of the blood**



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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. VI, No. 2

CONTENTS

March, 1936

COMPLETE NOVEL

- RAFFLES AND THE DEATH ROCKET.....Barry Perowne 14
The Gentleman Cracksmen Tackles a Tangled Web of Mystery!

TWO COMPLETE NOVELETTES

- BLOOD MONEY.....James Duncan 47
G-Men on the Trail of a Gigantic Criminal Plot
NARCOTIC MAN.....Frederick C. Painton 84
Duffy Kildare Defies the Blazing Guns of Dope Smugglers

TWELVE THRILLING SHORT STORIES

- DAMNED SPOT.....Barry Brandon 61
Escape Seemed Sure—Shawm Planned Carefully!
TEN POUNDS OF NAILS.....Charles Molyneux Brown 63
The Killers Used a New and Devilish Weapon!
NEAT JOB.....Howard Adams 71
A Hitch Seemed Impossible—but Fate Grinned
THE PEOPLE REST.....Emile C. Tepperman 75
A Fiend of Murder Faces Grim Accusation!
LEOPARD'S PAW.....Edmond Hamilton 81
The Menacing Threat of Jungle Justice
CHICAGO SHAKE-DOWN.....S. J. Bailey 98
A Blood-Smeared Crime Feud Rages!
AN ORDER FOR MURDER.....Steve Fisher 105
The Pen, Benny Peel Decides, Is Mightier than the Gun
REWARD IN HELL.....Ralph Franklin 109
A Daredevil Detective Crashes a Secret Rendezvous
THE NITWIT.....William Merriam Rouse 113
Jewel Thieves Decide to Frame the Village Half-Wit
DEATH WRITES.....L. Frank Burleson 119
Corpses Tell No Tales—but ...
NOSED OUT.....George A. McDonald 121
Sheriff Grantley Faces the Toughest Problem of His Career
THE SILENT MEN.....Hugh B. Cave 126
The Jaws of a Criminal Trap Close on Bill Hafey!
OFFICIAL BUSINESS.....A Department 136

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HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?

TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.

BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT

TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE. I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO: IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES

TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST—

—SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVING SETS—
OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS
OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN

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THAT'S 'CUSE I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME

THANKS!

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OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.

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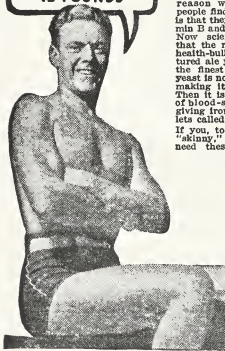
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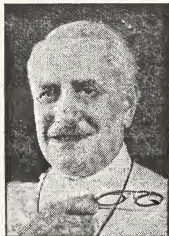
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HOW I LOOK
SINCE I GAINED
12 POUNDS**



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Present Position.....

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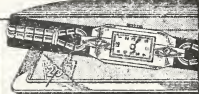
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RAFFLES *and the*



A
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The scene before us was appallingly vivid. In

CHAPTER I

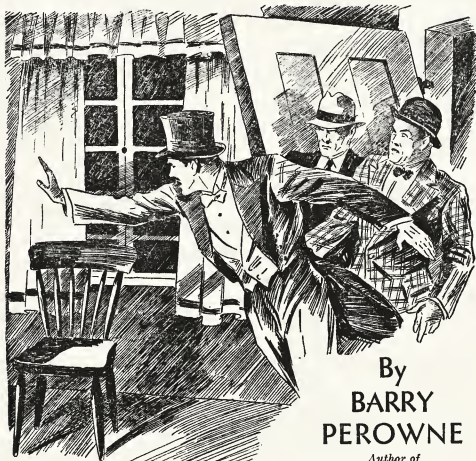
Night of Drama

AS the taxi shook to a standstill, I noted there was a little knot of figures gathered on the pavement opposite the house. Raffles opened the taxi door, stepped out—lean, elegant, erect, the light gleaming on his white shirt-front, his jaunty opera hat.

I ducked out after him and, as I did so, heard two muffled detonations from some neighboring street. A sudden, greenish flash winked wickedly in the night sky high over London. The faces of the watchers on the opposite pavement uplifted to see the swift blooming of colored stars in the sky. Green and gold and crimson, they came drifting down, fading, dying.

Sudden Doom Hurtles Through Space in this

DEATH ROCKET



F. R. Murphy

another instant the knife would sweep down

By
**BARRY
PEROWNE**

Author of
"The Return of Raffles,"
"The Devil's Own," etc.

Raffles was settling with the taxi-driver, and I took out and glanced at that intriguing card I had received three mornings before. In the light from the lamp in a wrought-iron bracket on the arch over the entrance to the courtyard, I read the words on the stiff, expensive card:

Sir Louis Mendawc, F. R. S., requests the pleasure of Mr. Manders and a friend, at nine p. m. on November the fifth, to wit-

ness an experiment in the conquest of space.

The taxi rattled off, and Raffles spoke quietly beside me:

"I told you that the man who sent that card had a sense of drama! He must have, to think of reserving such an experiment till fireworks night! And there's another example of his dramatic sense—look at his house."

It was, indeed, unusual, even for

Gripping Mystery of Sinister, Baffling Crime!

Mayfair. Once it had been a big livery stable, with the horse-boxes built on three sides of a cobbled, oblong courtyard, the fourth side being occupied by great carriage gates on Calloden Street, where we now stood.

Its present owner, Sir Louis Mendawe, the astronomer, had added three stories to each of the sides. Where the gates had been he had built, in the form of an arch, a covered passageway connecting the two sides. The arch was a pseudo-Tudor, half-timbered, and the bracket-lamp, although it burned a cluster of electric bulbs, was carefully in the period. The gates of wrought bronze, under the arch, were open, and a number of cars were parked in the courtyard.

Piccadilly Circus, with its roar and rumble of traffic, its glaring, winking, pulsating sky-signs, though a bare ten minutes away, seemed strangely remote from this singular house in this gloomy, aristocratic street.

Muffled detonations came from the back streets, vivid flashes in the sky. November the fifth—night of fireworks. Night of masks and shooting stars, but a night for the grotesque, the mysterious, the dramatic. A night through which ran a cruel, bright, eager motif—Flame!

With a sense of adventure my friend, A. J. Raffles, cricketer, gentleman, and crook, and I, Bunny Manders, his partner in crime, passed beneath the arch and into the shadowy courtyard.

I SURRENDERED my hat, coat, and scarf to an impressive footman, adjusted my monocle, and as the footman's stentorian voice announced our names followed Raffles forward to greet our hostess.

Inside, the house was as curious as its exterior. The hall was long and rather narrow, with a lofty, raftered roof, shadowy above the richly-shaded clusters of electric lights.

Sumptuous rugs lay on the parquet floor, and the furniture was

rare and massive. At each end of the long hall stairways curved upward.

Through a lofty arch came the lilt of a waltz, and I caught glimpses of lovely gowns, white shoulders. The air was pleasantly warm, with a faint scent of perfumes and Turkish tobacco.

Lady Carla Mendawe stood in the archway, at the head of the steps. With a smile, she extended a hand to Raffles.

"My husband should have been here, but there are important, last-minute preparations to be made, it seems, for his experiment. You probably understand—"

"It is my friend here," Raffles smiled, "who is learned in these matters."

I hastily deprecated my slender knowledge of astronomy, and bowed over her hand. Lady Mendawe was a woman of striking beauty, rather tall, with the whitest, finest skin I had ever seen. Her dark, smooth hair, parted in the center and dressed low on her white neck, her magnificent necklace of amethysts, and the deep purple of her gown, all emphasized the silken whiteness of her arms and shoulders. Her eyes were sloe-black—appraising eyes, secret eyes—her lips scarlet. At one shoulder she wore a silver flower.

"My husband will probably keep us all waiting for hours while he makes his final preparations," she said, smiling. "So we are dancing." From a table behind her she took two crimson silk masks. "Wear these," she said. "Won't you? After all, it's Guy Fawkes night! Oh, and—Grant!"

She called to a man standing near. He turned, lean and tall, elegant. Above the crimson mask he wore, his dark hair was frosted with grey at the temples, his forehead deeply lined; about his firm mouth, too, as he smiled, were lines deeply graven. His eyes glittered steel-grey through the slits in the mask.

"Mr. Grant Cardinal—"

I tensed suddenly. Grant Cardinal, K. C.!

"Will you have a drink?" he said pleasantly.

Moving after the attorney, I glanced at Raffles. He was smiling faintly, his teeth white under his neat, black mustache. His blue eyes were keen, sparkling; and catching my glance, he raised his dark brows in a way that I knew, eloquent and mocking. Then he slipped on the crimson mask.

It was more than possible that Grant Cardinal was acquainted with a body of men not well disposed toward us—Scotland Yard!

THE elegantly-appointed bar occupied a recess off the ballroom. After Cardinal left us, Raffles and I lingered over whiskey and soda, watching the masked dancers. Presently Raffles said softly:

"Cardinal seems to be playing host—while Sir Louis makes his final preparations."

I nodded.

"I didn't expect," Raffles murmured, "quite such an elaborate social affair in celebrating a scientific experiment. Know any of the people here, Bunny?"

I watched the dancers swaying past. The strips of red silk could not disguise certain photographed faces and well knowns.

"One or two," I said cautiously.

Raffles lazily tapped a Sullivan Egyptian on his thumb-nail. Under the strip of red silk his eyes were smiling faintly.

"The Countess of Clanloch is here—wearing the Clanloch rubies!"

He spoke so softly, he might have been talking to himself.

"Lady Lestern in the jade-green gown! She's wearing the Khaipore pendant, that great diamond!"

I saw the blue sparkle of his eyes as he held the lighter to the tip of his cigarette. He inhaled deeply, leaned back, tucking the lighter with brown, lean fingers into the pocket of his white waist-coat.

"That lovely child in white, with the tawny hair," he chuckled softly. "Joan Vanarden, the American ambassador's daughter. See those pink

pearls—perfectly graded! And Lady Mendawe herself—you saw her necklace of amethysts? There's a fortune here tonight—"

I leaned toward him, my heart thudding, spoke between my teeth:

"A. J., I warn you! I'll be no party to—"

He smiled mockingly, his teeth white under his neat mustache.

"I never work unless I feel lucky, Bunny. I don't tonight!"

He rose suddenly.

"Let's take a look around! What's that door there?"

The door led to the garden. Long, thin lines of light coming through the curtains of the ballroom windows, reached out across the lawn. The turf was crisp and frosted under our light evening shoes.

The garden was small, but ornamental, hemmed in by a tall, grey stone wall and thick shrubbery. Here and there glimmered ghostly statues. Save for the muted lilt of the music, it was very quiet.

"Across there," said Raffles, pointing with the red tip of his cigarette, "there's an alley. I suspect, with a tradesman's entrance."

I peered at him, suspiciously.

"A. J.! Are you still thinking of those jewels?"

I knew my picaresque friend well—too well. I knew, on this night of fire, what particular fire had been kindled in his veins—the vivid fire of rubies, the cold light of diamonds, the sheen of pearls, the sparkle of amethysts! I was sick with apprehension.

Far off a Roman candle blazed a white arc of sparks across the dark sky.

"Somebody," said Raffles, "is having fun over Blackfriars way!"

He turned toward the house—and suddenly checked, his fingers closing hard on my arm as we stood in the shadows.

In the doorway a girl was standing—a slim figure in pale blue, against the light, her short, wind-blown hair so blond as almost to be silver. She was looking back into the ballroom, through her crimson mask,

with a queer, still intentness, and from her attitude I got the impression she wished to see and not be seen.

With a quick movement she turned, catching up her long skirt in one hand, and ran swiftly along the massive stone terrace. For a moment I lost her in the shadows, then saw her again swiftly mounting a narrow, iron staircase, zigzagging up the side of the house, above the level of the ballroom. Then she was gone.

Raffles' cigarette dropped—a red point in the dark, and his shoe blotted it out.

"She's up to something," he said softly. Already he was moving toward the terrace. I followed reluctantly. But nothing was moving as we stood at the foot of the iron staircase, peering up.

"I'm going up!" Raffles whispered.

I was bitterly reluctant, but I knew my unique friend too well to argue. His curiosity had been aroused.

I followed his shadowy figure up the narrow, steep, iron staircase, our light shoes making no sound until we reached the level of the flat roof. Then, with a swift, soundless movement, we were over the edge and on the roof.

As I followed, his hand pulled me down behind the shelter of some potted shrubs.

Across the flat, leaded roof loomed the dome of a small observatory. The sliding, curved sections of plate glass shone with light. We heard the low hum of machinery, and then up through the dome there came slowly into view, inch by inch, a monstrous shape.

It was not a telescope, for its tip was sharply pointed. Gradually, smoothly, to the whirl of the machinery, it emerged from the lighted dome, swivelling gently round. It was like nothing so much as a gigantic high-explosive shell.

But it was not a shell. I knew what it was at once—the instrument for "the experiment in the conquest of space" which we had been bidden to witness.

Far off the spires and roofs of London there showed sudden flashes in the sky, abrupt spurts of fire—rockets and Roman candles.

But that vast, menacing shape, looming at a sharp angle across the sky, was the greatest firework in London on this night of November the fifth—a rocket to the moon!

I felt Raffles stiffen sharply beside me.

"There she is!"

As though by magic, she materialized out of the shadows—the girl with the blue gown, the crimson mask, the silver-blond hair!

She was standing in the vague glow of light, peering up at the giant outline of the moon rocket.

Suddenly she moved, raising one arm, half turning.

And that second, with a queer, muttering catch of his breath, Raffles hurled himself forward. I heard her low cry as they struggled. Then, sharp and clear through the hum of the machinery, the crack of an automatic, a crimson spurt of flame, brought me lunging to my feet!

CHAPTER II

Slaves of the Rocket



S I ducked out from behind some potted shrubs, the girl ran full tilt into my arms!

For a second I held her, confusedly aware of a very delicate perfume, the gossamer touch of her hair on my cheeks.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she sobbed.

The desperate thrust of her hands against my shirtfront threw me off balance, and I fell back, freeing her.

Before I could recover, she was past me, and at the head of the iron staircase, poised against the sky. As I lunged forward, she was gone!

"Let her go!" Raffles' voice said urgently. "Here—quick!"

We ducked back into the shelter

of the shrubs, crouched there, breathing hard. I realized then that the observatory door was open and a man standing there, sharply silhouetted against the light.

His attitude was tense, listening—then he came quickly forward, his light shoes almost soundless on the leads. He passed our hiding-place and checked at the roof-edge, peering down the staircase into the dark well of the garden.

For seconds he stood there, gripping the stair-rail, peering down, listening. In his free hand was a small revolver.

Turning back, he glanced around the roof. The light from the open door of the observatory made a long path across the leads. We could see him plainly. He was young, tall, rather slightly built, and wore evening dress. His face was handsome, lean, palely white, his hair dark and rumpled. He looked up at the vast, looming shape of the moon rocket, and I heard him muttering. The same thing, over and over:

"Too late now! Too late! Too late!"

THE flat note of despair in his voice was rather terrible. Then he drew a long breath, squared his shoulders, and walked forward, re-entered the observatory. The closing door shut off the trail of light across the leads.

The disappearance of that light made me aware of another—more diffused, more vague and silvery. Peering up, I saw that the moon, now at the full, had climbed above the cloud-wrack. I glanced back at the huge shape of the giant rocket, trained obliquely upon that pale world remote across the leagues of space. It was somehow ugly, sinister, significant.

Raffles touched my arm, and as silently as we had come, we descended the iron staircase.

Those brief, exciting moments up on the roof, in the frosty night, seemed unreal, dream-like, when we stood again at the edge of the dance-floor, with the din of music and talk



RAFFLES

in our ears, and the warm scent of Paris perfumes and Turkish tobacco in our nostrils.

Raffles stopped a passing footman, asked him where he could wash his hands, then signaled me to follow.

Only when he thrust his left hand into a basin of crystal-clear, warm water, and the water turned cloudy crimson, did I realize that he was hurt. I stared at him, startled.

"She got you, A. J.?"

"Just above the wrist," he said grimly. "Seared the flesh, that's all." He took the white silk handkerchief from his breast-pocket. "Tie it up, will you?"

I made as neat a job of it as I was able, and re-fastened the emerald link in his stiff cuff. The bandage was hidden.

Raffles looked round at the door of the luxurious little marble-tiled wash

room, then took from his pocket a tiny automatic of exquisite workmanship, with a pearl handle. Through the slits in his mask, his eyes glittered bluely.

"Hers?" I said hoarsely.

"Yes! You saw what she tried to do?"

He examined the pretty, deadly toy carefully, slipped it back into his pocket.

"She tried suicide—the little silver blond. Why? And why did she go on to the roof to do it?" He drew thoughtfully on his cigarette, taking a pace or two across the black-and-white tiled floor. Abruptly he said, with a gesture of exasperation: "I don't get it! I don't see why she went on the roof, unless—unless that rocket of Sir Louis Mendawe's means something to her that it doesn't mean to anybody else!"

I stared. "What d'you mean?"

He frowned at the tip of the cigarette between his brown, strong fingers. Abruptly he smiled.

"I don't know what I do mean—exactly! But there's something mighty—mighty curious surrounding the dispatch of this rocket. I feel it! I—"

He broke off suddenly. With a quick stride, he was at the door, whipping it open.

OUTSIDE stood the young man from the roof observatory!

There was a second of silence, broken only by the faint blit of the music from the ballroom. Then the man from the observatory stepped into the washroom, closed the door, stood with his back to it. The tenseness of his tall, slightly-built frame, the queer, brilliant glow in his dark eyes, betrayed his excitement. But his voice was low, steady:

"So there was somebody on the roof just now! Sir Louis was right; he thought he heard someone, and sent me out to see—"

"One gathers," Raffles said coolly, "that you've been listening at the door?"

"I have—yes! I caught two words that—interested me! So I listened."

"If we can be of any assistance," Raffles said, with a faintly mocking wave of his cigarette, "you've only to command us!"

The dark, glowing eyes of the young man regarded him steadily.

"I caught the words 'silver-blond' and 'suicide'!" His hands clenched convulsively; the knuckles showed white. "Were you talking of Lesley Lorne?"

"If Miss Lesley Lorne," said Raffles quietly, "is a young lady with silver-blond hair, wearing a pale blue gown, we were referring, certainly, to Miss Lesley Lorne!"

"She tried to kill herself?"

He seemed to force the words, low and hoarse.

"She did!" A. J. said briefly.

The young man's eyes burned darkly in his haggard face.

"We're to be married soon!" he said huskily.

"Then perhaps you know," said Raffles, "why she tried to kill herself?"

The young man's tongue flickered along his lips. "No! I've no idea! None!"

Raffles looked at him steadily—then shrugged.

"Unfortunately! But if I may make a suggestion, I'd go and find her—try to discover the trouble. It might be a good plan to take her home!"

"This is her home—mine, too!" There was a bitter note in the young man's voice. "Lesley is Lady Mendawe's social secretary; I'm Sir Louis' assistant in the observatory. My name's Armour—Piers Armour. I helped him to build the rocket; I must be there at midnight to see it dispatched! That's vital!"

"More vital than the welfare of your fiancée?" Raffles said gently.

Armour gestured, his hands quivering.

"You don't understand—"

"There are a lot of things here tonight that I don't understand!" Raffles said grimly. "I don't understand why Miss Lesley went to the roof, looked at the moon rocket, then tried to kill herself! I don't understand why you came to investi-

gate with a revolver in your hand!"

"Sir Louis was—nervous," said Armour, uneasily. "The successful dispatch of this rocket means a great deal to him—everything! It's been his life work; he's given his health, his fortune to it! He's built great rockets before, but they've never been successful. All his hopes are centered on this rocket. We call it X-vastus. He's its slave! Can't you understand why he's so anxious there should be no hitch?"

I put in a word: "Do you mean that somebody might try to tamper with it?"

"There's no reason to think so," Armour said quickly. "But we can't afford to take chances of any hitch. Nobody has any right to be prowling about on the roof, but you know, at a party like this, there are a lot of people who take the rocket as rather a lark—the biggest bang in London on Guy Fawkes night! That gun wasn't loaded; it was just meant to have a sobering effect on anybody who started playing the fool!"

"Why did Sir Louis choose to throw a party," Raffles asked, "if he feared his guests might cause some hitch?"

"The party wasn't Sir Louis' idea," Armour shook his head. "Lady Mendawe persuaded him to release it tonight—Guy Fawkes night—and let her give a big party! She saw the rocket as a chance for a novel and dramatic party!"

"I—" Raffles began, and stopped, looking at the door.

Armour glanced around as the door slowly opened. Mr. Grant Cardinal—tall, lean, distinguished—stood there looking from one to the other of us through the slits in his mask.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, in his dry, cultured voice.

Nobody answered. Raffles turned to the mirror and thoughtfully adjusted his white tie. Cardinal's grey eyes rested on young Armour.

"Piers, Lady Mendawe is looking for you. Lesley—"

"I'll go at once," Armour said, with a queer catch in his voice.

As the door shut behind him,

Grant Cardinal crossed to one of the black marble basins, set the water rushing, and pushed back his cuffs. In the mirror, I saw his dark, lined face, his steely eyes studying us through the slits in his mask. He spoke quietly, without turning:

"Gentlemen, I am closely acquainted with Detective-inspector Duke Roth, of Scotland Yard—who, I believe, knows you! If anything untoward should occur here tonight, I shall know where to look!"

"Bunny," Raffles said, "let's go and dance!"

Cool, debonair, he gave no sign of having heard the attorney's deadly warning.

WE returned to the ballroom. I was in a fever of anxiety to get away. The thought of the giant rocket oppressed me. The huge projectile seemed in some obscure way to menace this house.

I had the feeling that the destiny of more than one person here was linked with the moon rocket; as though invisible strands—the strands of fate—connected the rocket with certain people—with the little silver-blond, Lesley Lorne; with Piers Armour, hot-eyed, raw-nerved with some secret anxiety; with the still man, steel-eyed Grant Cardinal, K.C.; with Sir Louis, whom I had never seen; and with, perhaps—I could only guess—the dark beauty, Lady Carla Mendawe.

The moon rocket was all ready for an incredible journey; before it stretched illimitably the infinite leagues of outer space, the unimaginable mystery of the heavens. Even in that warm, crowded ballroom, I was conscious of the wide night outside, of the cloud-packs hunting across the moon's face, of the icy, remote stars. I felt dwarfed.

The music ceased abruptly—on a discord. And in the same second, startlingly, the lights went out, except for here and there an electric wall-candle.

For a breath the crowded room was still—stunned to silence—save for here, where a woman caught breath,

there, where a man moved sharply.

Then there came a rasp of curtain-rings, and through the windows poured a crimson light, amazingly vivid.

It changed kaleidoscopically—was green, yellow, blue by turns. From outside came a volley of reports, a swift, sharp crackling, punctuated by heavier thuds.

Then laughter swept the room, and the masked dancers stampeded to the windows—exclaiming, talking—a babel of sound through the detonations from the lawn.

"Fireworks! Marvelous!"

They were pouring toward the garden door, throwing open the French windows. The display continued, an intricate pattern of fire on an invisible framework, whirring fountains of sparks, spinning-wheels of flame.

I would have moved forward with the crowd, but Raffles' hand shot out, gripping my arm.

"Wait! Listen!" he whispered.

At first I heard only the excited babel of talk and laughter of the dancers who were jostling out through the French windows, the crackling and hissing and banging of the fireworks.

"Hear it?" Raffles breathed.

Then I heard—a shrill, thin thread of sound through the confusion; a sound strangely urgent, starting, stopping, starting again. A telephone ringing wildly!

CHAPTER III

Bait for a Trap



T was I who was responsible for our presence in the house that night. I cursed the chance that had brought us here in the first place.

The man who lives on his wits, the *chevalier d'industrie*, is confronted annually with an awkward

problem—that of accounting to the income-tax authorities for his source

of income. Raffles and myself lived pretty luxuriously. Raffles had his own yarn to account for his where-withal; I—Heaven help me!—called myself a journalist.

Toward April every year I would become afflicted by ghastly qualms. What had I to show, in cold print, to bolster my thin tale of freelance journalism? In the grip of these qualms it was my habit frantically to torture from what, for want of a better word, I call my brain, one or two articles and perhaps a short story or so.

It was to this necessity that we owed our invitation from Sir Louis Mendawe to witness his "experiment in the conquest of space."

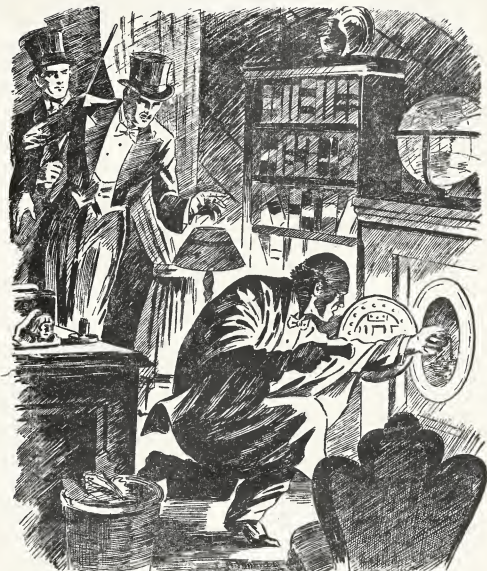
Not long before, I had met a man learned in the lore of the great space rockets, and, with his permission, had turned his information into a series of short, popular articles, over which my name had appeared. It was to these rocket articles that I owed that card of invitation from Sir Louis Mendawe.

My interest in the great rockets was genuine, and I had persuaded—actually persuaded!—Raffles to come with me. Now I was bitterly regretting my authorship of those articles!

Grant Cardinal's menacing attitude had, I confess it, scared me. Our stock stood dismally low at Scotland Yard, and particularly with Detective-inspector Duke Roth.

Roth had nothing on us, but our part in a certain recent "affair"—though it had helped him—had left him, nevertheless, suspicious and hostile. He was not sure, but he suspected that we had got something ourselves out of that business.

We had—a trifling matter of one hundred thousand pounds in good Bank of England notes! It had been, in fact, our biggest haul, and the embittering part of it was that, as we later discovered, the numbers of those notes were known to the Yard, which was seeking to trace them. That attractive sum was salted away—under an alias of A. J.'s—in a safe-deposit box. A fortune; and we dared not touch it!



A man crouched, his hand in the circular orifice of a small safe in the wall

Meantime, Detective - inspector Duke Roth was waiting, with vindictive eagerness, to welcome any slip on our part which would enable him to get his large and powerful hooks on us.

These thoughts flickered like lightning through my mind as, with Raffles' hand on my arm, I stood in the ballroom of Sir Louis Mendawe's house and listened to the wild, neglected shrilling of a telephone.

Raffles spoke softly:

"Never neglect a ringing telephone! It may be the grocer at the other end—or it may be the missing link in a chain of circumstances. Come on, Bunny!"

We were apparently alone in the ballroom. From the terrace came gusts of talk and laughter, punctuated by the detonations of the fireworks.

Swift and silent, Raffles moved under the arch, down the two carpeted steps to the hall where the lights

had been dimmed to a few shaded wall-candles.

At the foot of the steps we checked, listening. Then, sharp and distinct, quite close, again the shrilling of the telephone, a sustained, impatient ringing.

Raffles moved quickly along to the foot of the curving stairs, then mounted. I was at his heels.

We stopped outside the first door on the first landing. The telephone was in that room—ringing in impatient spasms. Raffles jerked the handkerchief from my breastpocket, draped the white silk lightly over the door handle. Very gently, he tried the door. It was unlocked. Inch by inch, he opened it, peering in.

With a quick movement, he pushed the door wide open, slipped inside. I followed. He closed the door.

THE room was lighted by a reading-lamp, shedding a pool of red radiance over a massive, carved, flat-topped desk. Dim shelves of books, lined the walls. The room was a man's study.

The telephone shrilled again. Raffles stepped quickly to the desk, dropped the handkerchief over the receiver, lifted it. "Hallo?"

He waited, the receiver at his ear, his eyes, through his crimson mask, glittering blue, on me. He listened, then spoke:

"Yes—yes. Not at the moment. I can give her a message—"

I watched him, fascinated—and only out of the corner of my eye did I catch the abrupt, startling flash from the shadowy corner of the room, where a leather screen stood.

There was a low *phut*! The reading-lamp struck the carpet with a tinkle of breaking glass. In the darkness something brushed against my arm. My fingers clutched a solid figure—but it was gone instantly, twisting free.

I heard a gasp, the sickening sound of a blow, then the desk-chair thudded on the carpet. Raffles' voice came, low and urgent:

"Look out! Quick!"

A line of light appeared suddenly, across the room. The door! Somebody had slipped out, leaving it ajar.

Raffles brushed past me to the door, closed it and pressed the light switch. The lights sprang up, showing Raffles still holding the telephone receiver, a length of snapped flex dangling from it.

He glanced at me with a queer, grim smile.

"What have I always said? Always answer a ringing telephone—you never know what interesting news you'll hear."

"What was it?"

"The beginning of a message for Lady Mendawe—and a mighty queer message! I got the beginning: 'Tell Lady Carla Mendawe that there is still time—' That's all! A woman's voice, I think. But what woman? There are a million or more in London to choose from!"

"That man," I said hoarsely. "Who—"

"It might have been any one of the guests. I got only a glimpse of him—evening dress, red mask, like all the others. But"—again he smiled grimly—"unless I'm mistaken, I put a distinguishing mark on him!" He held up his fist—there was blood on his knuckles. "He lacks, I think," said Raffles softly, "one of his front teeth!"

He glanced quickly around, and nodded.

"That snapped telephone flex and the broken bulb of the reading-lamp—somebody's going to be puzzled! But there's nothing to show that we've been here—and the sooner we get out, the better!"

He stepped to the door, glanced up and down the landing, signalled me. As I slipped past him on to the landing, he switched off the lights, closed the door, rubbed his handkerchief quickly over the handle.

Quickly and quietly, without meeting a soul, we descended the stairs. Then, unobtrusively, we joined the crowd on the terrace.

We had been fortunate in our little flanking movement upon the tele-

phone. We had not seen even a servant.

But who was the prowler in the study—the man with the silencer-fitted automatic? Had he, too, been attracted by the ringing telephone? Had he heard us enter the room, then flitted into concealment behind that screen?

But why had he shattered the reading-lamp and attacked us? The prowler must have had some reason to fear our receiving that cryptic message. He must have guessed what that message would be—and who was at the other end of the line.

What was the meaning of that cryptic message—"Tell Lady Carla Mendawe that there is still time—"

Time for what? Time, perhaps, to retract some action—

A startling thought struck me suddenly. My imagination suddenly suggested a possible finish to that sentence:

"Tell Lady Carla Mendawe there is still time—*before the firing of the moon rocket!*"

I could not have said why I felt so certain, but I experienced an absolute conviction that that broken and mysterious message would have finished thus. And, if I was right, was the message a warning or a threat?

I looked about for Raffles. The lights had gone on again in the ball-room and the masked dancers were turning back, laughing and talking.

I stood a little aside watching for Raffles. The light from the windows fell in broad lines across the terrace, with its low stone rail. At intervals along the rail, tall shrubs—azaleas, rhododendrons, ornamental fig trees—stood in pots, making blurs of inky shadow.

I watched the guests as they filed by. Lady Mendawe, her lovely shoulders glimmering white above her purple gown, brought up the rear. She was not masked. Her face was a pale oval against her dark, smooth hair. She came up the stone steps from the lawn with another woman.

Talking animatedly, they drew

level with the tall, potted rhododendron at the top of the steps—and, so rapidly and skilfully that I could scarcely believe my eyes, a hand reached out suddenly from the shadows behind the rhododendron, hovered for one second close to Lady Mendawe's white neck, and was gone.

I stood frozen. My cigarette dropped from my nerveless fingers. The two women passed on through the French window into the ball-room.

But not before I had seen that Lady Mendawe no longer wore her necklace of amethysts!

As the music started in the ball-room, a debonair and elegant figure stepped out from behind the rhododendron, paused to light a cigarette. In the small flare of the lighter I saw the lean, masked face of A. J. Raffles—the mocking glitter of his blue eyes, watching me!

He clicked out the lighter, tucked it into the pocket of his white waistcoat, moved forward and then hooked an arm through mine. In a daze I heard his low, satiric voice:

"They're really very good amethysts, old chap—excellent bait for a trap!"

CHAPTER IV

Lesley's Sealed Lips



RAFFLES was surprisingly superstitious. He would never go on the cricket-field without his old and dismally faded Zingari cap. Nor would he, as he had reminded me, practise his perilous profession unless he felt

himself to be in a vein of luck.

Tonight, he had said, he felt the luck to be against us. I, too, sensed danger in this house. What, then, had ever possessed him to fly in the face of Providence by robbing Lady Mendawe of her amethysts?

I knew A. J.'s love of precious stones, but I had never before known

him to abuse hospitality by victimizing his hostess.

I was in a sweat of anger and apprehension. I meant to have it out with him. Either he would give me a satisfactory explanation—for I put no stock in his talk of the amethysts as bait for a trap—or I would get out of this house and leave him.

Such thoughts for Bunny Manders, so long Raffles' unquestioning satellite, were rank anarchy. The words, though, of that icy man, Grant Cardinal, K.C., burned in my mind.

And Raffles had the jewels in his pocket! The hair prickled at the base of my scalp.

But the moment we entered the bar recess I saw that it would be impossible to have it out with him at once. The place was full of people! Raffles looked at me with a faint smile.

"What'll you have, old boy?"

"Brandy," I said, glaring at him.

We stood on the threshold, watching the dancers. Suddenly he reached out and took the glass from my hand.

"There's Lady Mendawe—disengaged! Have you danced with her yet?"

"No! What—"

"She's your hostess," Raffles reminded gently. "Your manners, Bunny. Go and ask her to dance, and"—he lowered his voice—"ask her what's happened to her amethysts!"

I breathed hard: "A. J., I'll be—"

"Trust me, old sock," he said very softly.

His blue eyes glittered strangely—but he smiled with his lips.

I kicked myself for a weakling and a fool—and crossed to my hostess, bowed, and asked her to dance. She smiled, and we moved out upon the floor.

She danced magnificently, that lovely, white-skinned woman with the sloc-black eyes.

"You're one of my husband's scientific friends, aren't you?" she asked.

"Scarcely scientific," I said. "I'm a journalist who once wrote some articles about space rockets. I am

honored that Sir Louis read them. I'm looking forward to meeting Sir Louis—"

She smiled faintly. "I shall be terribly glad when the rocket is finally fired. I have seen so little of my husband for weeks—indeed, months! He practically lives in his study and his observatory."

I felt deeply troubled. So she would be glad when the rocket was fired! But if she knew of that mysterious telephone message, would it make any difference? Would she still be glad? I felt guilty. Heaven knew what might result from our interception and withholding of that strange message.

The music seemed faint and remote; my movements were mechanical. My thoughts were of the wide, cold, moonlit night; that huge, somehow menacing projectile, jutting obliquely from the sliding roof of the observatory. What would happen when at last the moon rocket was fired—went forth upon its stupendous journey?

Lady Carla's low, contralto laugh brought me back.

"Are journalists like scientific men, Mr. Manders—hopelessly absentminded?"

I apologized quickly, added, watching her narrowly:

"There are some wonderful jewels here tonight. I have been admiring your amethysts, but I see you've taken them off—"

She missed a step as her hand went quickly to her throat. Faint color crept under her white skin. Her dark eyes dilated strangely. Then she said, very calmly:

"Yes. The clasp was not very secure."

SHE left me immediately, at the end of the dance. I returned to Raffles.

"Well?" he asked quickly.

As I finished telling him what had happened, Lady Mendawe passed us without a glance, went through the door to the terrace.

Through the slits in his mask, Raffles' keen eyes met mine clo-

quently. Tapping a Sullivan lazily on his case, he turned toward the door to the terrace—and, at that moment, a footman appeared at his side, holding out a silver salver with a white envelope on it.

"Mr. Raffles, sir?"

Raffles' strong mouth tightened.

"Yes."

"A note for you, sir. A gentleman—a guest, sir—he said you would know—"

"Thank you," said Raffles. He took the note.

As the footman moved away Raffles stood tapping the envelope gently on his thumbnail. I caught his eye and he gently inclined his head toward the door to the terrace. Casually, we strolled outside.

"What does it mean, A. J.?" I demanded as the stained glass panels closed behind us.

"We'll mighty soon see," he said grimly—and ripped open the envelope.

His eyes flickered over the half-sheet of expensive notepaper, then without a word he handed it to me. I read the boldly pencilled message:

"You may be too clever for the police, but what I know about you is plenty. Lady Mendawe's amethyst necklace is in your hip-pocket. I don't grudge it to you, but be warned. Keep your hands off the rest!"

The Marquis."

"A. J.," I said tensely, I'm getting out of this while the getting's good! What, in Heaven's name, possessed you to lift that necklace, anyway?"

"The theft of the necklace was a trap," he said softly, "as I told you. I wanted to observe Lady Mendawe's reactions when she discovered her loss. Even though she might not want to spoil the party, surely she'd have a detective sent to run an eye unobtrusively over the guests on the chance that there may be some known jewel thief present." Raffles smiled oddly. "But will she do it? Bunny, I don't think she will. I don't think Lady Carla Mendawe wants the police here tonight. There's something curious building up round the dispatch of the moon

rocket—and she's in it! That interrupted message—it was either a threat or a warning! So I stole this necklace as a test—a trap. If she doesn't phone the police, if there's something criminal connected with the firing of that giant rocket, she'd rather sacrifice the extremely valuable necklace than have Yard men here—"

I glanced swiftly, nervously along the terrace, across the shadow-striped lawn.

"But man, what a mistake for you to steal the necklace! Somebody knows you've got it—this Marquis—who is he? What's he after? For the love of Heaven, A. J., get rid of that necklace—and let's get out of here!"

"You can do as you please, Bunny," he smiled, "but I'm going to see this through!"

"Why? What is there in it for us?"

"I'm not sure—yet. But there are those two kids—Lesley Lorne and young Armour! They're caught up in this business—and something tells me it's ugly, Bunny, ugly. What drove that little silver-blond to the point of suicide? Why is young Armour so nerve-ridden—so afraid? He lied to us. He knows why Lesley tried to kill herself—and he's helpless; he loves her, yet he can do nothing for her. Well, maybe we can, Bunny!"

BUT we can't afford to be quixotic! Great Scott, A. J., our freedom's at stake!"

"It's been at stake before," he said mockingly. He checked his hand on my arm, peering at the side of the house. "Go or stay, old sock—I know what I'm going to do!"

He moved quickly, quietly away along the terrace. For one moment I stood uncertainly—then I went after him. As always, when it came right down to it, I found it impossible to desert that unscrupulous, daring and quixotic rogue—my friend, Raffles!

As I came up with him he pointed up at a window on the second floor.

Chinks of light showed through the curtains.

"That's where she is—Lady Mendawe! I saw the lights go on."

As Raffles for the second time that night mounted the outside iron staircase, I followed. We stopped on a small, flat platform in front of that second story French window, open an inch or two.

Crouching down on the iron platform, Raffles peered into the room as I peered over his shoulder. A good three-quarters of the room was visible. It was a boudoir, tastefully and richly furnished. As we watched a woman came into view; Lady Mendawe.

The long, subtle lines of her purple gown emphasizing her grace, she crossed the room slowly, her dark, gleaming head a little bent, as though minutely and systematically she were searching the carpet. She was deeply troubled.

Suddenly she checked, as though listening, then turned quickly to the door. As it opened I heard Raffles' excited whisper:

"Lesley!"

She stood on the threshold—young, exquisitely lovely in her pale blue gown, her skin faintly golden. With her blue eyes, her silver-blond hair, the beauty of the younger girl contrasted strangely with the dark fascination of Lady Mendawe.

Slowly Lesley came in and closed the door. Lady Mendawe's low contralto voice floated out to us, almost caressingly:

"What do you want, dear?"

The girl stood oddly tense, her hands clenched.

"Lady Carla—" She spoke jerkily. "I know! I know everything!"

"Everything? I don't understand, Lesley."

Lady Carla's back was to us. I could feel Raffles tense as a steel spring. The girl made a taut gesture with her hands. Her hair shone like silver.

"Oh, don't fence! I can't stand it—I can't, I tell you!" Her voice broke, and she caught her breath sharply. "It's murder—murder!"

"That is an ugly word to use, Lesley—without some very adequate explanation!"

Lady Carla's voice was a purr, silken. She moved backward a pace, hands behind her. Between her and the window was a small desk, dainty and feminine. Her hands, groping behind her, found the handle of a small top-drawer. I half-rose, tense, glaring. For in her hand Lady Mendawe held tightly a small hypodermic syringe, taken from the drawer.

Raffles' fingers gripped my wrist like a steel trap.

"A very ugly word, Lesley," came the purr of the dark lady.

The girl stood motionless, looking at the elder woman with a terrible intentness.

"You have been good to me—I've been grateful, Lady Carla! But what am I to do, now? I would rather die—I did try tonight to kill myself—than give you away! But somehow you've lured Piers into this terrible plot! You two—whom I loved! What am I to do? And in a few minutes the rocket will be fired! Oh, I implore you—stop it! Stop it—"

"And how will that help us—now? You know everything, you say, Lesley. Then I ask you—how will it help us, now, to stop the rocket?" Lady Carla moved slowly forward. "No, you are overwrought, Lesley. It will be better"—her voice was soft, drawing—"if you sleep a little!" She was very close to the girl now. "When you awake, it will be—all over—"

WITH a move amazingly rapid she gripped the girl's wrist, drove home the needle of the syringe.

I was quivering with the desire to smash through the window to go to the girl's aid. But Raffles' grip on my wrist did not relax.

Lady Carla stepped back a pace. The girl raised her left hand slowly, gazing as though dazed at a speck of blood on her forearm, just above the wrist. She lifted her head as with a great effort. Her lips moved—but no sound came. Suddenly she swayed. Lady Carla caught her, low-

ered her gently to the carpet. She lay still, one hand thrown out limply, her wonderful hair silvery against the dark carpet.

Without warning, a hand-bell on the roof began to ring with a startling, brazen clangor. On one knee beside the unconscious girl, Lady Mendawe looked quickly around at the window. Then she arose, moved swiftly away from our line of vision and the next second the lights went out.

Raffles straightened up, and as he moved, the latch of the window clicked shut. I had a momentary vision of a white face—Lady Mendawe's—then the curtains fell back into place. She had looked straight at us! She must have seen us!

The bell on the roof was ringing metallically. From below came the sound of the French windows opening, of excited voices, one clear above the others:

—“The rocket! That’s the signal! They’re going to fire the rocket!”

I looked down over the rail. The gay, laughing crowd were making eagerly for the foot of the iron staircase.

“Come on,” Raffles breathed, close to my ear, and we started for the roof. The clangor of the bell stopped. I became aware of a strange, loud, beating sound, like nothing so much as the regular, repeated stroke of a giant metronome!

CHAPTER V

Moon-Bound



made for the shelter of the potted shrubs. The roof was shadowy, the moon partially obscured by driving clouds very high up.

Across the roof loomed the domed observatory. The door was closed.

Only a faint light, a vague blur, showed through the curved sections of glass. That was not unusual; it is customary to dark-

en an observatory when the telescope is in use. From the dim interior of the observatory there came that metallic, regular stroke we had heard:

Tack—tack—tack—

Between each beat was an interval of perhaps five seconds. I could guess the significance of the regular, loud beating like the pendulum of a gigantic clock that throbbed in my brain like a great pulse. The firing of the moon rocket was to be timed by clock work.

The night was icy, but I was sweating with excitement, with straining eyes, peering at that huge shell-like, fantastic shape thrusting up dark and oblique through the dome of the observatory—X-vastus, the moon rocket.

Would its next resting-place be the lip of some desolate and frozen crater of the moon? Or would it merely travel out into nothingness, be consumed by friction, cease to exist?

Suddenly a girl appeared at the top of the iron staircase, laughing to someone behind her:

“Darling, you’ve been treading on my frock all the way up!”

“I’ll buy you a new one!” said a masculine voice. “Move on, sweet—they’re pushing me!”

Then, quite abruptly, the roof was crowded. Raffles and myself slipped out from our hiding-place. A girl, crimson-masked, plucked at my sleeve.

“Is that it—that awful-looking thing?” She laughed. “I bet it makes a bang! I hope Sir Louis won’t be long; I’m all goose-flesh!”

It was merely a lark to these people—just a big laugh. The situation was bizarre!

And despite all the queer, undercover activity Raffles and I knew to be going on, we could do nothing. Mystery and murder surrounded the giant rocket; we knew that—but how prevent it? We might try to prevent the imminent firing of that rocket, but how could we explain any such action?

Besides, we were known to be crooks. And in Raffles’ pocket this

minute was Lady Mendawe's neck-lace!

The extraordinary scenes we had witnessed pointed to one conclusion: built round the moon rocket there was a conspiracy of murder! We knew it, and were powerless!

Lady Mendawe was in the conspiracy. Her drugging of Lesley Lorne who knew the truth was proof of that and that she was a danger to Lady Mendawe. And I knew now that Raffles had allowed Lesley to be drugged because, unconscious, the girl was helpless to make any move against the conspirators, and was herself safe from them for the time being.

But Lady Mendawe had seen us. Had she recognized us?

In the faint moonlight, the guests stood about in chattering groups. Suddenly Lady Mendawe, a light wrap over her shoulders, appeared at the head of the iron staircase, came forward and joined one of the groups. I heard a murmur:

"Here he comes!"

The observatory door had opened. A man stood on the threshold. The chattering was suddenly stilled, and the sound of the machinery came startlingly loud:

Tack—tack—tack—tack—

I knew Sir Louis Mendawe instantly from his photographs—a big man, with stooped, heavy shoulders, an iron-grey beard, a mane of grey hair. He wore a long white linen coat, unbuttoned, showing the black and white of evening-dress beneath. Above the steady *tack-tack* of the clockwork his voice came resonant and deep, but with an odd, occasional lisp.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there are some scientists among you, but there are more who are not. I'm looking forward to discussing"—the sibilants were a curious hiss—"to discussing the technical details later with my scientific friends. Meanwhile, I will not weary you with talk of strains and stresses, of my researches into heat and friction-resisting metals, of my calculations as to speed, angles and momentum!"

There was a little rustle and murmurs in the crowd. Raffles and I were in the front rank, only a few yards from the astronomer.

"Most of you know something about the moon. It is the satellite of our earth; it is about two hundred and thirty-eight thousand miles distant from us, and presents a target for my rocket of about two thousand one hundred and sixty miles in circumference. That may sound like a big target, but"—his bearded lips parted in a smile—"my scientific friends will assure you it is a target very easy to miss!"

RAFFLES caught his breath suddenly; I heard his low whisper, close to my ear.

"Did you see? Jove, man, look—his mouth!"

I peered intently at the shadowy, bearded face of the rocketeer. I saw his handkerchief go to his mouth, dabbing at it—then, as he withdrew it, I saw!

What he was saying I scarcely heard—something about the intense cold of the moon's surface and the theory that there was upon it some form of intelligent life.

But my whole mind was occupied by one amazing fact! Sir Louis Mendawe had recently lost a front tooth! The gum was still bleeding!

It seemed impossible—incredible! But Sir Louis Mendawe must have been the man who had shot out the lamp in his own study and attacked Raffles as he took that mysterious telephone call.

I tried to concentrate on what the astronomer was saying.

"It's Sir Guy Fawkes night—fireworks night! It pleased my wife to make my little experiment in the conquest of space the *piece de resistance* of a party. I am glad that she should obtain some pleasure from it" he smiled, glancing across at her—"for without her help I could never have built this rocket, never have pursued my life's work! I only hope you will not be disappointed by it as a spectacle.

"That *tack-tack* you hear is the

pendulum which marks the revolutions of a huge screw gradually tightening. The stroke of the pendulum will grow slower, more labored, as the screw tightens. When the pendulum stops, there will be a space of thirty seconds—then the first explosion will occur and the rocket will be released!

"If I am successful, if my rocket reaches the moon, I predict that within five years greater rockets will be built; rockets capable of carrying a man!" His voice rose. "The mighty problems of space will be solved! Men will travel among the planets, explore them, contrive means of signalling their discoveries to the earth! Man will be master of the firmament!"

He broke off, said in a lower voice:

"I have contrived a small, illuminated replica of the pendulum. From it, you will be able to observe progress. You will not be kept waiting long!"

HE spoke to someone in the observatory, and then I saw Piers Armour in the dim interior. Then Sir Louis passed within, and the door was closed.

There was a second of silence, broken only by the steady *tack-tack-tack* of the clockwork. Then somebody began to applaud. A volley of hand clapping swept the roof—and abruptly died away as, above the door of the observatory, there sprang into being an illuminated, moving shape. It was the pointer of a pendulum, swinging steadily, regularly, from side to side of a semi-circular arc of light.

It must have been synchronized very exactly to the greater pendulum inside, for its beat coincided mathematically with the *tack-tack-tack-tack* from within.

I glanced at Raffles. By the glow from his cigarette I saw that he was watching Lady Mendawe. The astronomer's wife stood very erect and still, looking up at the illuminated pendulum. Her hands were clenched tightly at her sides. About her closed lips there hovered a shadowy

smile; and the smile of the sphinx was not more secret, hid no stranger knowledge, than the smile of Lady Carla Mendawe.

Raffles had opened his lips to speak to me—when across the roof rang out the wild scream of a woman.

The suddenness, the shrillness, the terror of her cry was heart-catching. I wheeled round. Two men were bending over a woman who lay prone on the leads. Raffles lunged forward, I at his heels.

"What is it?"

One of the men shook his head.

"Heaven knows! She suddenly screamed—and collapsed!"

It was Joan Vanarden, the American ambassador's daughter! She lay very still, her gown a faint shimmer of white. The other man said, his fingers on her limp wrist.

"Fainted. That's all! Over-excite—"

Raffles said suddenly, his voice even, cool:

"I noticed earlier this evening that Miss Vanarden wore some very wonderful pink pearls! Where are they?"

"Gone!"

A woman nearby gave a quick, low exclamation. I jerked around. It was Lady Lestern, her hands at her throat.

"The Khaipore pendant!" she gasped. "It's gone—too!"

The Khaipore pendant! That was startling enough—but it was only the beginning! One by one, the guests discovered their losses. The finest jewels in that gathering—the Khaipore pendant of Lady Lestern, Miss Vanarden's pink pearls, the rubies of the Countess of Clanloch, many others—had been ruthlessly looted!

Utter confusion, panic, swept through the strange roof gathering. In a cold frenzy of terror, I gripped Raffles' arm, dragged him clear of the crowd, faced him, panting.

"A. J., by heaven, have you—"

"Don't be a fool," he said harshly.

"The Marquis—remember that note? He had 'em marked."

A sudden shout whirled me about.

"The pendulum! Look!"

I was just in time to see that the illuminated pendulum stood stock-still—upright!

There came a series of swift, muffled detonations, a deep rumbling, a blinding blue flash. I thought I saw a colossal shape, hurtling—the moon rocket!

The door of the observatory swung open. A man came reeling out, his arms thrown up before his face. He stumbled two paces, swayed, spun half-round—collapsed!

It was Piers Armour!

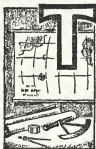
Raffles raced forward, caught up with him at the door of the observatory. He was staring in—

The observatory was empty!

Where was Sir Louis Mendawe?

CHAPTER VI

Mystery of Two Worlds



THE moon rocket, too, was gone! And with that colossal firework the thought came with absolute conviction—there had gone also into outer space, the solution to the mystery within this house!

Raffles' cool, crisp voice roused me from my bewilderment.

"Find the light switch, Bunny! Let's have a little illumination."

A panel of six switches was to the left of the door. At random, I snapped down two. The observatory was flooded with light.

The floor was cemented; a short concrete pillar formed the base which supported the great shining length of the telescope. Parallel with the big telescope, the range-finder slanted; under the telescopes was a sort of coffin, on an adjustable framework, in which the telescopist reclined through his night-long vigil with the stars.

To the left of the telescope was an object like a narrow, tall, steel box, its top sloping up at an angle par-

allel with the present angle of the telescope. This box, I guessed, was the base upon which the giant projectile had been constructed.

A great ebonite panel occupied one wall. Upon the panel was marked a half-circle of divisions and figures. A huge pointer—the pendulum—indicated the exact center of the half-circle. Against the opposite wall stood a massive bench, littered with papers and blue-prints.

I took in these details of Sir Louis Mendawe's observatory in one quick, comprehensive glance, then a sharp exclamation from Raffles drew my attention to him. He stood near the bench, bending over a thick, open exercise book.

"What is it?" I asked.

"The log," said Raffles softly, "of the moon rocket—kept, presumably, by Sir Louis Mendawe."

A voice spoke authoritatively from the open door:

"You will pardon me, gentlemen, but I think nothing should be touched until the police arrive. I have given orders that they be telephoned for immediately."

A man stepped into the observatory, glancing about him. He was short, slight, with a stoop so pronounced as almost to give him the appearance of a hunchback. Yet there was something about him at once dandified and arrogant—something about his pale, aquiline face, his light, quick eyes that was hawk-like. Hatless, his high skull shone completely bald; over his impeccable evening dress he wore a black cloak with a crimson lining; the cord of an ebony, silver-topped stick was looped over his wrist. His eyes flickered about the observatory.

"Where is Sir Louis?"

"That, sir," said Raffles courteously, "is what we were wondering. Where is Sir Louis?"

"He should be informed at once," said the arrogant old dandy, "that there has been a robbery—a very serious robbery. With the approval of Lady Mendawe, I have assumed charge until the police arrive. I feel, however, that Sir Louis should

be found, to take control at once. His assistant, young Armour, is very gravely hurt. Luckily, there is a Harley Street man here. Sir Herbert Cavann. In view of the robbery, gentlemen, I think I am justified in suggesting that nobody leave the house—that nothing be touched.”

I liked the little old dandy. There was something crisp and competent about him, and his arrogance was that of an aristocrat. Probably somebody important. Raffles said warmly:

“Completely justified, sir—particularly as I believe there’s been something happen considerably more grave and terrible than a robbery!” At the look of suspicion in the man’s eyes, he handed him the exercise book. “Read that,” he said quietly, “the last entry in what I take to be Sir Louis’ log; an entry evidently made this evening, perhaps not more than twenty minutes ago—”

The old man took the book, adjusted on his sharp nose a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses. He glanced up once as he read, amazed.

“But this—is this incredible!”

“Read on,” said Raffles.

He read on, exclaimed sharply several times, then closed the book with a snap.

“Gentlemen, this is an unique, an amazing document! It—it—”

“That’s Sir Louis’ handwriting?” Raffles asked quickly.

“Undoubtedly! I know it beyond possibility of error. I have had a great deal of correspondence with Sir Louis at various times. I—”

A woman’s white arm slid over his shoulder, taking the book from his hand.

“Pardon me, Mr. Sully; I think I have a right to see that, whatever it is.”

It was Lady Mendawe, standing in the doorway of the observatory. I sensed—indeed, I knew—that she was a ruthless and dangerous woman; yet I admired her. There was gallantry about Carla Mendawe, and poise. Against her smooth black hair, her lovely, cold face was marble white, but her eyes burned darkly, inimical and secret.

Sully made a gesture as though to stay her. Her strange, compelling eyes regarded him steadily.

“I have a right, Mr. Sully—”

He shrugged his hunched shoulders.

I had not read that last entry in the log of the moon rocket, but I had seen its effect upon Raffles, upon the small and elegant Mr. Sully. I watched Lady Carla Mendawe tensely, expectantly.

WITH no change of expression on her beautiful, cold face, she read the entry through from beginning to end, then, quite deliberately, closed the book and looked up.

“Then he is dead?” she said.

“Not necessarily,” said Raffles. “He is—missing; that’s all.”

“He is dead,” she said with finality. “It was suicidal! This book tells everything.”

She put the book aside among the papers and blue-prints on the bench, and for a moment, with her hand resting on the book, stood as though absorbed. Then she raised her head and looking up through the domed roof into the blue, vague night. She drew a long shuddering breath, then looked directly at Raffles.

“There’s a malady that they call moon madness, isn’t there?” She nodded slowly, her eyes darkly shining. “For weeks, for months, he has watched the moon each night, all the night through. He made himself a prisoner in this observatory, with his telescope and his rocket, his photographs of the moon. But only his body was here; his mind was a prisoner of the moon!” I was astonished to see two crystal tears sparkling in her dark eyes. “I think I understand.”

In a fever of excitement I picked up the exercise book—and read in a back-sloping, thick handwriting, the last entry of Sir Louis Mendawe.

—Nov. 5th—

I have marked the date with a red ring! How long ago did I do that? It must be months! Yet always there has been a feeling that this day,

would never come—that some hitch would occur—that X-vastus would disappoint me—that I should fall ill, or die. Anything—everything!

"But the day has come! It is here now! And I am not afraid—only a little intoxicated mentally.

"They don't suspect—not even Piers, who helped me build X-vastus, who knows of the compartment in it, just big enough to contain a man; snug and tight and safe. But Piers does not know of other preparations I have made; of my experiments in blood-pressures, the tests to which I have subjected my heart; my improvements upon the oxygen mask; my contrivances for nourishment.

"As far as my calculations show, the impact of landing should not be impossible of survival; but that will be the supreme test of X-vastus.

"To be the First Man in the Moon! Ah, to die out in space, lonely as no man has ever been lonely—that is a fate almost as glorious as to succeed.

"I shall be sorry to leave Carla—almost certainly never to see her again. But this is my life's dream! Not even for her can I retract, now!

"It is all simple. Presently, Piers will ring the bell, and Carla's guests will come up. I make my small speech; I re-enter the observatory with Piers, and then—this is an unfortunate necessity—I must stun him, lest he try to prevent my entering the rocket.

"They will see the departure of the rocket! But not one will suspect that in that hurtling projectile there is a living man—headed for the moon! They discover this entry in my log—probably the last words I shall write upon the earth.

"How the wires of the world will hum! All the telescopes of the earth will be trained upon the moon—in California they will be watching, in Borneo, the Himalayas, on Table Mountain, above Broken Hill, in the uttermost Andes—watching for some signs—some signal!

"Can I reach the moon—and survive? Can it be that I, Louis Mendawe, shall be the first man to com-

municate between the moon and the earth? These things are on the lap of the gods. Possibly, after a time, I shall be 'assumed dead'; but always there will be the men who will wonder—and look at the moon! For, once shot, the rocket can never return—and, whether I succeed or fail, I shall be always a fable in the imaginations of men.

"Piers is going out to ring the bell. My wife, my terrestrial friends, I salute you—I who stand on the brink of the ultimate mystery!

"Farewell!"

I felt, as I looked up from that exercise book, that I was coming back from another world. But I was brought sharply to this one as I saw Raffles raise his hands slowly above his head, staring at the doorway.

I turned—to confront the menace of two automatics. A harsh voice rasped:

"Put up your hands!"

The hot eyes of Detective-inspector Duke Roth of Scotland Yard, glared across the observatory.

To the man beside him he snapped: "Search them!"

With an icy thrill of fear and despair, I was remembering Lady Mendawe's amethysts. In Raffles' pocket!

CHAPTER VII

Raffles Reconstructs a Crime



FEELING no surprise, only inevitability, I faced Inspector Roth's automatic. He had us—and I knew it.

There was a triumph in the smile on his hard mouth. He was a handsome man, one of the new school of Yard men; ex - University, ex - Olympic Games champion with the javelin; young, blond, magnificently built, arrogant with success, and possessed of a notorious, white-hot, brutal temper. Also, he bitterly hated us.

As his man moved toward me,

Roth, gun steady, his heavy, belted overcoat unbuttoned over his smart lounge suit, his grey, soft hat drawn down over his light-brown, burning eyes, snapped harshly:

"Take those infernal masks off 'em, sergeant! Not that they hide anything. I'd know those two anywhere: Messrs. A. J. Raffles and Bunny Manders, gentlemen-about-town!" He laughed sneeringly.

"Funny, that whenever there are queer doings in a house, they're always among those present. It happens a shade too often for coincidence. Well, maybe this time you've gone a shade too far! The Khaipore pendant—the Vanarden pearls—the Clanloch rubies."

Raffles said coolly:

"Are you arresting us, Inspector?"

Roth's mouth twisted dangerously.

"I'm searching every man-jack in this house!" His eyes veered to the old dandy, watching amazed. "Who are you?"

"My name is Lucian Sully. I'm an antique collector. I live at 25 Ellman Place, Mayfair. Inspector, I find your tone extraordinary in a Scotland Yard man!"

"The consensus of opinion," said Raffles airily, "is that his tone and manner will lose him his job some day. He's a cave man: he has hair on his chest!"

"**YOU'D** feel easier, if I were out of the Yard, wouldn't you?" Roth snarled.

"That," said Raffles insultingly, "is a matter of supreme indifference to me!"

Roth's eyes glittered.

"Sergeant, get at that man! Snap into it!"

"This one with the monocle's got nothing on him, sir," the sergeant reported of me. "And no gun!"

He whipped away A. J.'s mask, dipped skillful fingers into his breast pocket. I adjusted my monocle—my mask had been removed—and with every nerve tingling watched the sergeant exploring Raffles' pockets.

I had no idea what Raffles in-

tended to do when the necklace was found—whether he would surrender or would try a break for it. His brown, handsome face was inscrutable; he was smiling, his blue, mocking eyes on Roth.

Abruptly the sergeant stepped back from Raffles—empty-handed!

"Nothing on him, sir."

I could not believe my ears—my eyes! I had expected the flash and snap of handcuffs; or a fight—a wild dash! My relief was so great that my knees felt suddenly weak. Where, how and when had Raffles got rid of the amethysts?

The old dandy, Lucian Sully, was tapping his ebony stick impatiently on the cement floor.

"Now that that's over, Inspector, I had better inform you that there's something more serious, more strange, than robbery happened here; something, perhaps"—his voice was mildly ironic—"a little outside your experience!"

He stopped, groping on the floor for the exercise book I had dropped. Roth moved forward, his hot eyes on Raffles.

"I'm not through with you yet—by a long shot, A. J. Raffles, Esq.!" His voice was bitter with enmity. He snapped at Lucian Sully. "What are you talking about? The boy, Armour? I shall have some questions to ask about how he was hurt—and we'd better get downstairs!"

But the little, exquisite Sully, with his hunched shoulders, his red-lined cloak, smiled oddly, proffering the exercise book.

"Read this first, Inspector—the last entry. It will tell you how Piers Armour was hurt—perhaps otherwise interest you!"

Roth took the book impatiently, and it was in that moment that I felt the light touch of Raffles' elbow against my side. He was peering intently through the door.

I had a momentary glimpse of a tall figure on the roof, looking in the observatory door. It was gone in an instant. But not before I had seen that he was the grim advocate, Grant Cardinal, K.C.; that he held a hand-

kerchief to his mouth—as one does who has lost a tooth!

Ten minutes later, Raffles and myself were in the little bar recess. We were not to leave the house; nor was anybody, for the time being. Inspector Roth had drawn a cordon about the place to enforce his order. And every room in the house was a blaze of light.

I ORDERED a double brandy, neat. I needed it, and would have repeated it, but Raffles stopped me.

"No, you don't! You'll have a single with soda! This night's not finished yet."

We carried our drinks to a divan, out of earshot of the wooden-faced waiter. The rest of the guests, at Roth's order, had gathered in the hall.

The cessation of the music, leaving an eerie quiet, and those bright, empty rooms gave the mansion an atmosphere of crisis.

As we sat down I asked in a low voice:

"How did you get rid of the amethysts—and when?"

Raffles sipped his drink, put it down on the table thoughtfully.

"When Joan Vanarden's pink pearls were missing, I guessed at once there'd been a haul—that the chances were other women had been robbed! I got rid of the amethysts right then. You'll find 'em in the pot of one of those shrubs on the roof."

It was so infernally obvious I ought to have guessed it.

"Who is the Marquis?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Raffles—"yet. But I'm beginning to suspect he's something more than a skillful and impudent jewel thief. I don't think he'd be adverse to a spot of blackmail if he saw the chance."

"What makes you think that?"

"The voice on the telephone," said Raffles.

"You think that was him?"

"It may have been a confederate."

He smoked for a moment, frowning. "You know how a jewel thief works, Bunny. He spies out his land carefully, tries to find someone in

the household he can pump. He knew this Guy Fawkes party was coming off, that he was pretty well informed of the programme for the evening. He knew who wore the best jewels, and had his eyes on 'em. It's obvious, too, he knew a good deal about the affairs of this house, which means that he may also have stumbled on some hint of the queer game being played here. He probably got a hint—just enough to make him scent a chance for blackmail if he could get at the truth! He must have arranged with a confederate to ring up and leave that ambiguous message for Lady Mendawe. The Marquis is someone among these guests—and I figure he wanted to observe Lady Mendawe's reactions when that message was given her."

I nodded. "That does seem to account for that otherwise inexplicable message, A. J. But we took it—we didn't pass it on to Lady Mendawe. Then who was the man who attacked us in Sir Louis' study—interrupted the message?"

Raffles drew deeply on his cigarette, looked at me keenly through the drifting smoke.

"You remember what Lesley Lorne said: 'It's murder!' She was right, Bunny! Murder it was! And the victim, Bunny—" his voice grew solemn—"was Sir Louis Mendawe!"

He glanced at the wooden-faced waiter, then spoke low and rapidly:

"You saw Cardinal out on the roof just now, with a handkerchief to his mouth. Why was he skulking? Because he's lost a tooth, and he knows that we know how he lost it! He was the man who interrupted the telephone call!"

"Wait!" He struck the table. "We noted that when Sir Louis made his speech, he had also lost a tooth—recently! What are the chances against two men having lost a tooth here to-night?"

"A most improbable coincidence," I said.

"Exactly!" Raffles' teeth flashed white. "Bunny, the man who made that speech was not Sir Louis Mendawe! It was Grant Cardinal, made

up to look like him—with the observatory light purposely dimmed!

"Bunny, consider! For months, Sir Louis has been practically a hermit in his observatory; his study. Cardinal and Lady Mendawe are in love! That's plain from their actions. It's probable that she wanted a divorce—and Sir Louis refused. He had no money of his own and she's very wealthy. He wanted her money to spend on these giant rockets he was so fanatical about. It's all guess-work, naturally, but I can conjure in my mind a fair picture of what actually happened when Sir Louis was killed—in a moment of passion."

He paused long enough to light another of his eternal Sullivans, went on in a low tone:

"I believe that when Cardinal and Lady Mendawe discovered that they were in love that they went together to the observatory to face Sir Louis, to demand he give his wife a divorce."

"They chose a time when Piers Armour was out of the observatory. Realizing that he had lost his wife's love, but determined to go on with his work, Sir Louis probably sneeringly asked Cardinal what a divorce would be worth. Enraged by the idea that Sir Louis would 'sell' his own wife, that would be the cue for Cardinal to attack the astronomer."

"Sir Louis was a big man, remember, and it may have been he was getting the best of the fight—perhaps had reached for a metal spanner or some other weapon to put an end to Cardinal—when Lady Mendawe took a hand. She may have shot—probably did—her own husband! To save the man she loved!

"And it would be here that Piers Armour would come in—literally. For at the climax of that scene I'm picturing, which I believe cannot be far wrong, except in details, Piers Armour opened the observatory door, stood on the threshold."

Again Raffles paused, giving me a moment to absorb the scene he had visualized and had pictured for me. Then he added, still in his low, rapid tone:

"In some such way as that, Bunny, Sir Louis Mendawe was killed—in a moment of madness—bitter passion! When did we receive that card of invitation to this party?"

"Three mornings ago," I said, dry-lipped.

"Then it was was about five—possible six days ago that Sir Louis was murdered! I am sure young Armour discovered their secret, whatever it was, and that they forced him, possibly through threats, to help them. Their problem was how to get rid of the body. And the means was the almost-completed rocket! I believe, with the help of young Armour, who understood the thing, they built Sir Louis' body into the rocket, knowing, that once it was fired, the rocket, so far as this earth was concerned, would cease to exist."

"We know that Armour's in the business somewhere, and I feel he must have come into it accidentally. The scheme was easy enough to work. None of the servants would suspect that Sir Louis was dead. He'd been a hermit in his observatory and study for months. Probably Armour was in the habit of taking him his meals. He could continue to take up the trays, then get rid of the food—"

"The girl," I whispered. "Lesley—"

RAFFLES nodded. "Somehow she must have stumbled onto the facts. Evidently she believed it premeditated—a conspiracy. She believed young Armour was in it. That's why she tried to kill herself."

"Tonight Cardinal played the part of Sir Louis. There's a trapdoor in the floor of the observatory. After his speech, Cardinal re-entered the observatory, went through that trapdoor down into the house. He removed his disguise and came up to the roof again by the iron staircase at the back. It was an essential part of the scheme that young Armour be stunned, and I figure that he agreed to it, but Cardinal struck harder than he intended."

I took up my glass, drained it.

"A. J.—"

That was as far as I got, for the sound that stopped me was the most horrible, the most sickening I had ever heard. A dull, heavy crushing thud on the paved terrace outside and a momentary whimpering cry.

Raffles leaped to his feet, lunged to the terrace door, flung it open. He checked, rigid, gazing down. Over his shoulder, in the fan of light across the flagstones, I saw the smashed and bleeding body of a man. The sergeant Roth had left in charge of the observatory on the roof.

CHAPTER VIII

Third Degree



IT WAS only for a breath that Raffles stood in the doorway gazing down upon that shattered and tragic figure. Then with a low exclamation of sorrow and bitter anger he stepped round the broken man, and ran rapidly along the terrace, looking up at the roof.

He was making for the iron staircase, and I followed him. After that first terrible glimpse of the smashed sergeant, I kept my eyes from him. Never would I forget the sound of the crushing, shattering impact upon the paved terrace of that hurtling human body, nor that brief whimpering cry from the darkness. To fall from a great height, aware for one fleeting, flamingly vivid second of death below, mutilation—to clutch, frenzied, at the yielding air—what a way to die!

It could not have been an accident. The sergeant had been hurled from the roof. By whom?

Running, I saw two dark forms suddenly lunge up the steps of the lawn, close with Raffles. Shouting, the three shadowy figures swayed, interlocked, across the paved terrace. Then shrill and clear the peal of a police whistle split the air.

I heard Raffles' voice, bitterly impatient:

"All right, Bunny. It's Roth's damnfool cordon."

He was between the two plainclothes men, his arms gripped. A shout came from behind me. Whirling, I saw a man in the doorway. Roth. He stared down at the mutilated sergeant, stooped over him, then straightened, striding forward. The bright lance of a torch shot out from his hand, shone on Raffles, gripped tightly between the two detectives.

"You, eh? I was wondering where you'd got to."

"He was running, sir," one of the detectives said quickly.

Raffles' voice cut in sharply:

"Your sergeant was thrown from the roof, Inspector! We were in the bar, as the waiter'll tell you. We heard the fall. If you don't get up on the roof quick you'll lose your man!"

For a second Roth hesitated, then snapped:

"Samms, get these two men inside, and stay with 'em. Nares, come with me!"

The group broke apart, Roth and one of the plainclothes men doubling away along the terrace, Roth's torch bobbing. Raffles, looking up at the roof, cursing under his breath.

"Get on there, you two! And don't forget my gun's on you!"

Raffles' shoulders lifted and dropped, as we turned back along the terrace. A man was on one knee beside the broken sergeant, the divisional surgeon I judged. He looked up as we passed, said: "Every bone in his body broken, Samms—killed instantly. Has anybody phoned for the ambulance?"

"Right, sir. I'll see to it at once."

The bar recess was deserted as we re-entered it. Even the frightened waiter was gone. The guests were still in the hall, waiting, on his orders, for Detective-inspector Roth to return.

Our guard covering us, put in a hurried call for the ambulance from the bar telephone, hung up, expelled

his breath in a long sigh, and looked at Raffles and me.

"What's going on here, anyway?"

Raffles selected a Sullivan from his case, lit the cigarette with a steady hand.

"Don't ask me, officer! All I know is that your superior seems, for no apparent reason, to have his knife into my friend here, and me!"

"There's probably good reason—"

"That," said Raffles, "is a matter of opinion!"

HE picked up the glass he had left on the table, drained it. As he put it down, Detective-inspector Duke Roth appeared in the doorway from the terrace.

"All right, Samms?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then get back to your post. I'll look after these two. Tell Nares to make sure the cordon's tight around this house! Then search every room in the place—and when I say search it, I mean search it!"

"Right, sir!"

Roth moved over toward the bar, pushed his slouch hat to the back of his head, thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. With blazing eyes he regarded Raffles and me. A. J. said coolly:

"From your behaviour, Inspector, I judge you failed to get your man?"

"I'll get him!" Roth said harshly. "He's in this house somewhere! There's a trapdoor in the observatory and that's the way he went! But the cordon's tight! He can't get away!" He looked at Raffles piercingly, then said suddenly:

"You went too far this time, Raffles! You may not have the jewels on you, but you did the job all right! I'll prove it, too, within twenty-four hours!"

"Your sense of values is curious, Inspector," Raffles drawled. "You read that entry in Sir Louis Mendawe's log of the moon rocket. The mystery of his disappearance should be a much more important thing than the everyday business of the Khaipore pendant, the Vanarden pearls, the Clanloch rubies! But,

perhaps—" Raffles' eyebrows lifted—"the Yard looks at these things differently?"

Roth snarled:

"The moon rocket business is just a firework-night hoax! A man fire himself to the moon? Bunk!"

"Exactly," said Raffles. "Bunk!"

He flipped ash fastidiously from the tip of his Sullivan. We knew that Sir Louis Mendawe had not fired himself in the rocket; but we also very legitimately suspected that Sir Louis Mendawe's murdered body had been fired in the rocket! But Roth's reasoning—unbacked by any knowledge of the evidence we had so curiously collected—stopped short at the hoax idea.

"That abracadabra with the rocket doesn't affect the main issue—and the main issue's the jewels!" he flared violently. "I don't know—yet—how or why that poor devil of a sergeant was hurled from the roof—but it has something to do with those jewels, and I'll get the truth if I have to pull this house down!"

Raffles, sitting on the table-edge, hitched up the legs of his impeccable dress trousers, and crossed his knees.

"So you just refuse to accept the indubitable fact that Sir Louis Mendawe has disappeared? Isn't that," said A. J. coolly, "rather like the ostrich that buries its head in the sand?"

"The jewels—"

"The jewels! The jewels!" Raffles waved his cigarette. "Bunny, observe the workings of a single-track mind!"

Roth's teeth snapped tight. His right hand whipped from his pocket—jabbed forward at Raffles.

"When did you plant these in that pot on the roof?"

From his fingers dangled Lady Carla Mendawe's amethyst necklace!

So startling was the reappearance of these infernal gems, so fiercely was Roth's question bull's-eye flung that if the detective had glanced at me my expression would have betrayed us!

But he was looking at Raffles. And not for a fraction of a second did the

gently mocking expression on A. J.'s face change.

"I don't follow you, Inspector," he said coolly. "I take it those are amethysts—?"

"They're amethysts, all right!" Roth rasped. "And the thief tossed them into a plant-pot on the roof when he was hard-pressed! You know nothing about them?"

"Nothing," said A. J. steadily.

Roth returned the amethysts to his pocket, his mouth working in an ungovernable rage.

"You're guilty as hell, Raffles! But I'll get you—you clever, sneering crook!"

Suddenly, with his open hand, he struck Raffles across the face. I grew taut, like a man on springs—ready for anything!

A. J. sat quite still for a moment, a red blur slowly showing under the tan of his lean cheeks. His nostrils were pinched and white. Very slowly and steadily he raised his cigarette to his lips, drew on it, his eyes, with a blue, unwavering glare, looking at Roth.

"A species of third degree," Raffles said slowly. "Yes. You'll certainly lose your job at the Yard one day, Inspector Roth—ex-javelin thrower. But I see what you want. You want me to attack you—so that you can arrest me. I'm afraid I can't oblige you. But I'll make a suggestion. You're a member of the Field and Track Club; so am I. Any day you care to phone me up, I'll meet you there. There's an excellent ring in the basement."

ROTH opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, turned and stalked out of the bar recess. Raffles' finger touched his cheek gently. He looked at me with a strange smile.

"I shall square that debt, Bunny! Within six months, Roth'll be out of the Yard! That's a promise!" He stood up, as cool, easy and debonair as though this dreadful night had just begun. "Meantime, old sock, since we don't seem to have been ordered to stay put, we'll see what's

happening among the other guests!"

We found them in the hall, talking uneasily in low voices, their eyes flickering restlessly to the plain-clothes men who guarded them. Their masks were gone; the atmosphere was one of tension.

Lucian Sully came up to us as we entered.

"Is it true that a patrolman has been killed?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," Raffles said briefly.

"This is a strange and terrible business," said the old dandy. "The police can think of nothing but the jewels; but the rocket—Sir Louis Mendawe's rocket—that is the amazing feature of this affair! Even now it is hurtling through space—through the ether, the stratosphere, into outer nothingness! And it carries a man—a living human being—from the earth! It is the most staggering drama of our century—and the police fret and fumble for a handful of baubles!" His hands clasped his ebony stick convulsively. "It is amazing—amazing!"

"Has everybody been searched?" Raffles asked.

"Yes. Nothing has been found. But the rocket—"

Raffles' keen eyes were scanning the faces in the room. His glance flickered for a moment on Grant Cardinal, sitting alone in a high-back oak chair across the hall. His brow, under his frosted dark hair, was deeply furrowed. Nervously, as though unconsciously, he dabbed constantly at his lips with a bunched handkerchief. Twice he moved quickly, glancing toward the detective on the stairs.

"Where is Lady Mendawe?" Raffles asked suddenly.

"She is upstairs with the police," Sully told us. "I caught some talk of a young lady lying drugged. Lady Mendawe's secretary, I understand. Lady Mendawe knew nothing of how it happened."

Lesley Lorne, of course. We knew how she had been drugged—and why; we had witnessed the incident of the hypodermic syringe. What

could it profit Lady Mendawe to lie since, when Lesley recovered consciousness, she could tell her story?

Fate! If Raffles' theory was right, a murder had been committed in a moment of high passions, inflamed tempers. To cover that murder, plans had been laid with meticulous care, the most anxious attention. An integral part of the plans was the giving of this Guy Fawkes party. But the giving of the party had brought under one roof a rich collection of jewelry.

The jewelry had attracted the attention of a cracksman—the Marquis. And the coup of the Marquis had brought the police to this house far sooner than had been bargained for in the careful schedule of the murderers.

THEY had not allowed for the intervention of the Marquis. He was the extra piece set upon the board of Fate, gratuitous, unexpected—the black pawn—to trap them in their own plans.

I was wondering about Grant Cardinal. It seemed certain to me that it had been he who, trapped on the roof, had hurled the police-sergeant to his terrible end. But how, with Roth and another detective examining the guests here in the hall, had Cardinal contrived to join those guests unremarked?

Suddenly I saw him move sharply, looking again toward the stairs, the handkerchief at his lips. The detective was looking up. Then Roth appeared. He gazed down upon us over the curving banister rail, his regard arrogant and bitter.

Raffles said softly:

"From his expression, he's got nowhere—"

"There is no need," Roth announced, "to keep you here any longer. What has happened in this house tonight is being—and will be—rigorously investigated! There is every reason to believe"—his eyes rested for a moment on Raffles—"that the stolen jewels will be returned to their owners within twenty-four hours! The names and ad-

resses of everyone present will be taken."

His words held a note of anticlimax for me. A babel of conversation broke out. And almost immediately footmen were bustling about with cloaks and overcoats and hat. Near me, I heard Lucian Sully say:

"I shall require a taxi, please. I told my chauffeur that if I did not leave by a quarter-past twelve, he could go."

The icy touch of the clear, still November night was bracing, refreshing as Raffles and I left the house. Raffles slipped an arm through mine. We walked across the courtyard, between cars that were stirring to life with suddenly flashing headlights, humming self-starters. We passed under the Tudor arch, with its wrought-iron bracket-lamp, and came out into Calloeden Street—deserted, picked out at regular intervals with the bright circles of the lamp standards.

Several taxis were parked before the house. A driver reached back an arm to open his door for us. I ducked into the gloomy interior, dropped back on the cushions. I was not exhausted! I felt no sense of fatigue. I was still strung up, excited. The affair was yet unfinished. I had no feeling of climax.

I felt a sudden, quickening interest, as I heard Raffles' directions to the driver. He did not give our hotel address.

He said, instead, crisply:

"Piccadilly Circus!"

He ducked in, slammed the door. As the taxi started I said to him eagerly:

"What's this mean, A. J.?"

"It means," he said softly, "that we're going on an errand! Roth's convinced we've got the jewels. Naturally we'll be followed! First, we've got to shake off the follower, and then—" The tip of Raffles' cigarette glowed up briefly, showing his face for a moment, lean, brown, taut, almost hawk-like, his blue eyes glittering.

"Then, Bunny—we're going to in-

interview the Marquis—and solve the murder of Sir Louis Mendawel!"

CHAPTER IX

The Black Pawn



THREE A. M. Piccadilly Circus.

The roar and rumble of traffic was gone. The darting, precocious urchins, with their pink cardboard masks and their fantastic effigies were long since in bed.

The sky-signs which had been dancing, pulsating fire, were no longer visible. The tops of the buildings were dark, the ranks and circles of the street lamps burned with a cold light. One or two fugitive figures, an occasional taxi—that was all. The moon hung pale and frosty-bright.

I looked up at the moon as we descended from our taxi at the corner of Shaftesbury Avenue—intently, as I had never looked at it before. For a moment I imagined I could discern a tiny black speck against it, such as might be made by a rocket hurtling through space. I felt immeasurably dwarfed. But it was only the quaint conceit of a man who had started in life as a spinner of tales and had developed into a crook.

But the rocket was out there somewhere—invisible, a grain of terrestrial dust hurtling across the lunar immensity. Still a grain of dust big enough to contain the body of a man.

As the taxi rattled away Raffles and I walked rapidly under the echoing, dark facade of the London Pavilion, plunged up the narrow side street which flanks the theater. Two lonely figures in silk hats, light overcoats walking along narrow, dim streets that mocked our footsteps eerily.

By the time we had worked our way round to Cambridge Circus we were clear of any trailer. We found

a late taxi, cruising along like a corsair on the coasts of night.

Twenty minutes later we were back in Mayfair, descending from that taxi at the corner of a discreet, deserted street, where shadow and light met in a sharp, bold line.

We had spoken hardly at all. We were to interview the Marquis, Raffles had said. But how he had discovered the identity of that daring thief, and what he had hoped to gain from the interview, I had no idea.

In silence, save for the click of our heels, we walked down the street. Raffles stopped suddenly, a hand on my arm. "There's the place, Bunny! Easy, now—easy!"

As we stood by the area railing of the massive Edwardian house, I realized suddenly—from the number—the identity of the Marquis!

Through the drawn curtains of the big bay window on the ground floor, splinters of light shone yellow. Raffles' ungloved fingers pressed my arm.

"Stick tight!"

He moved quickly, quietly forward, along the area railings, up the broad steps. Tense and ready, I followed. In the dark porch, his shirt-front flashed white for a moment as he took something from his pocket. Then I heard a slight, scraping sound, one or two tiny metallic clicks, a quick-drawn breath. With the faintest whine, the door opened upon the black chasm of a hall.

I followed Raffles' shadowy figure into the house of the Marquis.

To the right, a little ahead of us, a thin white line marked the door of the lighted room. Against the line were the two vague, soundlessly moving blurs of Raffles' ankles.

A minute creak, then an upright crack of light appeared, slowly widened. On the balls of my feet, I closed up behind Raffles, peering over his shoulder into the lighted room.

It was a big, luxuriously furnished study. Exactly opposite the door a man crouched, his back to us, his hands busy in the circular orifice of a small safe set in the wainscot.

I saw the man's shining, hairless scalp, his swinging black cloak—Mr. Lucian Sully!

Swift and soundless as a leopard, Raffles hurled himself across the thick carpet. A momentary scuffle, a stifled cry—and Mr. Lucian Sully was sprawling back in his big desk chair where Raffles had thrown him.

A light, quick footstep sounded in the hall behind me. I whirled, snatching at the first weapon to hand—Sully's ebony stick.

A man lunged out of the darkness of the hall—and stopped dead on the threshold. His eyes flickered to the stick in my hand, and to my amazement he raised his arms at once above his head. Raffles said dryly:

"It's a rifle-stick, old sock!" He snapped to the man with his hands up: "Move around here! Stand behind your chief's chair! Shoot if they try anything, Bunny!"

"ROUGH HOUSES," said Mr. Sully, calmly, "are not in my line. You have the advantage of me, Raffles—and I am a philosopher. May I say that it is a pleasure to meet you. We are both in the same line of—er—business. It's remarkable we haven't clashed before!"

"Marquis," said A. J., "the pleasure's all mine! You have style and urbanity. Your job tonight was planned and carried out with exquisite simplicity. Your car was drawn up in the courtyard. You pulled off your job on the roof, tossed the jewels down to your chauffeur, who was waiting in the courtyard. He drove off at once. It was as simple as that. I saw the whole thing and when I heard you tell the butler at the Mendawe house that you wanted a taxi—that you had left instructions with your chauffeur that he could leave at a quarter past twelve, why—"

"It was rather obvious, wasn't it?" the old dandy smiled.

A. J. seated himself on the edge of the desk.

"I've no quarrel with you about the robbery," said Raffles. "That's your own pigeon! But blackmail's

another—quite another thing again—"

"Blackmail?"

"Tonight," said Raffles, "a confederate of yours—a woman—telephoned the Mendawe house with a message for Lady Mendawe."

A puzzled look came into Sully's eyes.

"I know nothing of this. The jewels were my sole concern; I touch no other type of—er—business!"

A. J. looked at the old man intently, his dark brows, under his jaunty silk hat, frowning in concentration. Then:

"Marquis, I'm inclined to believe you!" he said abruptly. "In which case"—he paused, a queer note in his voice—"a singular train of thought is set moving!"

He took out his cigarette case, but so absent-mindedly that it slipped from his fingers. He bent down to pick it up, and the man behind Sully's chair moved sharply.

I jerked the rifle-stick.

"Stand still—you!"

"Martin," said Sully wearily, "don't be a fool! I abhor rough-houses. If these gentlemen intend to take the jewels—well, they have the drop on us, and that's our misfortune!"

Raffles smiled, getting to his feet.

"You needn't worry, Marquis! The jewels are your business, not ours! We won't trouble you any further."

The old exquisite arose.

"I have enjoyed meeting you, Raffles! Possibly we may do business together one day?"

"I do hope so, Marquis!"

They shook hands amiably.

"Martin," said Mr. Lucian Sully, "show the gentlemen out."

On that note of grotesque courtesy, those two skilled and urbane cracksmen parted company. It had been an amazing interview. I could not see where it had got us, and I said quickly, as we emerged again into the cold, bright night:

"What now, A. J.?"

He did not answer immediately. We walked on down Ellman Place. Suddenly A. J. said:

"It's that telephone message for

Lady Mendawe, Bunny. That's the crux of the business! If the Marquis was not responsible for that call, who was?"

He stopped dead, looking at me, his face oddly pale.

"I wonder," he said softly.

With a violent gesture he hurled his cigarette to the pavement, and started off with a nervous and urgent stride. We turned right, out of Ellman Place—right again, and were back in Calleden Street.

As we turned the corner, the side-lights of a big, closed car, parked against the curb, shone in our eyes. On a sudden decision, Raffles moved forward quickly, asked the man at the wheel:

"Can you tell me the time, please?"

The chauffeur was very small, with dark, refined features under the peak of his cloth cap—a Eurasian, I thought.

"The time, sir? About three forty-five, I think."

The answering voice was soft, almost silvery—like the voice of a woman!

"Yours, my friend," said Raffles, on a tense, quiet note, "is the voice of the telephone! Get out, and get out quick!"

Two minutes later, Raffles and myself, our arms linked tightly through those of the little Eurasian, passed again into the courtyard of the Mendawe Mansion.

We stopped dead at what we saw!

CHAPTER X

The Moon Slayer



IN the wide open doors a little knot of figures on the threshold was clearly silhouetted.

Lady Mendawe and Grant Cardinal were standing close together. To either side of them was a plainclothes man. I heard Inspector

Roth's crisp, decisive voice giving orders, but did not catch his words.

Raffles spoke excitedly:

"Bring this merchant along, Bunny!"

We dragged our prisoner across the courtyard straight to Roth.

There was a burning, deadly triumph in Roth's voice.

"You again—eh? Well, we've got a confession here. Lady Mendawe has confessed to the murder, with the aid of this man here, of her husband!"

Raffles whirled to the woman. She was speaking tonelessly, her hands clasped together. I saw the glint of handcuffs on her lovely wrists.

"I poisoned my husband—over many weeks! I poisoned him! His actual death occurred six nights ago, and Grant here and Piers Armour and I built his body into the moon rocket! I confess—I confess!" Her voice broke. "Isn't that enough? Oh, leave me alone! Leave me alone!"

"The entry in the log of the rocket was forged?" Raffles asked, with a strange gentleness.

"Yes—by Piers."

Her head was bowed. Cardinal stood like a man of stone. Raffles swung round to Roth, his eyes blazing.

"Where is Piers Armour?"

"In bed."

"Alone?"

"Yes! By the Lord Harry, Raffles, what—"

"Come with me!" Raffles' voice shook. "There may still be time—" "Time?"

"To save that boy's life!" Raffles hurled over his shoulder.

He was in the house, racing across the hall. I thrust the little Eurasian into the arms of one of the plainclothes men.

"Hold him!"

I lunged after Raffles, charging two steps at a time. Roth was just ahead of me.

At the second floor Raffles glared back, demanding:

"Which room?"

Roth caught the urgency.

"Third along!"

And suddenly, as the three of us hurled ourselves along the landing,

there rang out the wild, terrified scream of a woman!

Raffles flung open the indicated door, the next breath Roth and I were abreast of it.

The scene before us held, appallingly vivid. The bandaged head of the unconscious youngster in the bed, the big, heavy-shouldered man with one hand flung aloft, gripping a knife, menacing the unconscious man, and the horrified girl with silver-blond hair!

In another second the knife would sweep down.

The girl sprang, gripping the killer's knife wrist, and at the same moment Raffles was on the man from behind, whirling him round.

With giant arms he flung A. J. off and leaped free, facing us, crouched like an animal. His mane of grey hair was matted, his bearded lips worked, but no sound came.

Sir Louis Mendawe! The man from the rocket!

And before one of us could move, his knife hand swung up, struck with tremendous force, driving the keen blade into his own heart.

He fell forward, heavily, on the protruding hilt.

In the silence, was plainly heard the convulsive, sobbing breaths of the girl, on her knees by the bed, her arms about the unconscious form of Piers Armour, her cheek pressed to the bandaged head.

BEFORE we left that house, I heard the truth, as Raffles had pieced it together, after a talk with the silver-blond girl and Armour when he aroused.

"Sir Louis," explained A. J., "lived for his giant rockets. He'd squandered his own fortune on them and then started on his wife's. But she felt she was wasting her life tied to a visionary. When she fell in love with Cardinal and Sir Louis refused to give her a divorce, she refused to finance his rockets.

"He had to have money. He conceived a scheme of blackmail. He had to use Armour, so he told Armour he feared Lady Carla and

Cardinal were scheming against his life. He said that to test them he planned to give them what would appear to be an opportunity to murder him. He told Armour to pretend hatred for him, so that Lady Carla and Cardinal would conceive the idea of using Armour.

"They had a scheme all right. Sir Louis himself planted it subtly in their minds. Their idea was to poison Sir Louis and dispatch his body in the moon rocket. Day after day Sir Louis' meals were poisoned. Young Armour who took them up, afterwards reporting to the schemers that Sir Louis was dying. Actually Sir Louis did not touch the poisoned food.

"Six nights ago, Sir Louis feigned a collapse, probably drugged himself. Armour and Cardinal put his body into the rocket, and Armour closed up the top. Cardinal was convinced that Sir Louis would die in a short time; but actually, Armour took him out as soon as Cardinal was gone.

"Armour believed Sir Louis' idea was merely to test Lady Carla and Cardinal; he never dreamed Sir Louis was after blackmail.

"Cardinal and Lady Carla believed Sir Louis lay dead in the rocket, arranged this party and were convinced that Sir Louis' body had been dispatched in the rocket. In his guise of Sir Louis, Cardinal struck Armour harder than he had intended.

"Sir Louis encountered Roth's sergeant on the roof while he was trying to make a getaway, and killed him. Owing to the jewel robbery, Mendawe couldn't, as he had planned, steal out to the car which his confederate, the Eurasian, had waiting, because of the police cordon. So he went back into concealment in the steel-box framework of the telescope.

"The point of the cryptic phone call, of course, was to give Lady Mendawe and Cardinal the first hint that somebody knew of Sir Louis' 'murder.' The Eurasian was to collect the hush money from those two who believed themselves murderers. Sir Louis Mendawe planned to black-

mail his own wife for his own murder!

"I got the idea when I realized the Marquis was not responsible for the telephone call. I was sure I was right when we found the Eurasian waiting in that car.

"I figured Sir Louis must be still in the house, and then I remembered Armour. Armour, who'd been tricked and made use of, knew Sir Louis was alive. If Sir Louis' blackmail scheme was to work Armour must be silenced. That's why I made such a desperate rush when I heard that Armour, unconscious, was alone.

"By the way, about the entry in the log. Armour, on Sir Louis' instructions, pretended to the schemers he could copy Sir Louis' handwriting. The schemers believed Armour forged the entry, but Sir Louis himself wrote it.

"There was nobody in the moon rocket. Lady Carla and Cardinal are guilty only of attempted murder. And Sir Louis, blackmailer, murderer of the police sergeant, is dead by his own hand."

That was the story which my friend Raffles told to Inspector Roth. A. J. avoided mention of certain peculiar movements of our own, without which he could never have reached the solution. He had solved

the mystery, he told the fuming detective, by "intuition."

Dawn was greying the sky when we went out into Calloden Street.

With one foot on the running board of our taxi I looked up at the moon, paling now, low in the sky, incredibly remote. The rocket was out there, hurtling toward it.

What a night!

I ducked into the taxi, dropped wearily to the seat beside Raffles.

"We got nothing out of the business, anyway," I said sleepily, as the taxi started.

Raffles chuckled softly.

"Remember I dropped my cigarette case when we were interviewing the Marquis? His wall-safe, Bunny, was wide open and close at hand."

I sat up abruptly. His lighter clicked. In the small flame I saw resting on his palm something that flashed and flickered with the cold light of diamonds.

The Khaipore pendant!

"A penny for the guy," said Raffles as blithely as had the Guy Fawkes night urchins used the phrase in Piccadilly Circus. Dropping the pendant into the pocket of his white waistcoat, he tilted his silk hat over his eyes and composed himself for sleep.

Salaam, Raffles!

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CHAPTER I

Death by Appointment

THE Broker's Limited stopped with a fussy wheeze at Harmon, while an electric locomotive was shunted along the tracks to

replace the steam engine which had brought it from Chicago. Steve Tumulty, once a newspaper man, now with the Department of Justice, swung off the Pullman steps, walked briskly up and down to stretch his legs. As the conductor shouted:

"All aboard!" he turned, bumped into a tall, thin man with iron-grey hair, steel blue eyes and a jutting nose and chin.

His first words of apology were choked by a glance of recognition.

"Hello, Mr. Carmony. I didn't know you were on this train."

George Carmony, president of the Second National Bank, replied with dignity: "Hello, Steve. Coming in with a story for your sheet?"

Tumulty shook his head. "Not a newspaperman any more. Mr. Carmony."

They climbed on board just as the train gave its first convulsive jerk forward. Carmony moved to the Pullman in the rear. Steve, a bit taken back by the banker's evident desire to get rid of him, slid into his seat, stared out of the window.

The Harmon yards were dropping behind when the Pullman conductor came into the car, paging: "Mr. Tumulty, Mr. Tumulty, Mr—"

"Right here."

"Telegram, sir," said the conductor, handing Steve a yellow envelope. "Just got it from the station master."

Steve tore open the flap, spread out the sheet, glanced at the contents with frowning concentration.

The message was in code, from Department of Justice Headquarters in Washington. Long acquaintance with the intricate code gave Steve the contents almost at a glance.

STEPHEN TUMULTY
EN ROUTE BROKER'S LIMITED
CH.—N. Y.

IMPORTANT CONTACT GEORGE
CARMONY IMMEDIATELY ON AR-
RIVAL STOP BREAK IN COUNTER-
FEIT MONEY RING MAY HINGE ON
CONFERENCE STOP MEET CAR-
MONY AT HOME OF DANIEL
HUNTER STOP HE WILL BE IN-
FORMED THERE TO EXPECT YOU
HUBBARD

Tumulty's first impulse was to race back to the Pullman into which Carmony had disappeared, then he reconsidered. The Department expected implicit obedience from its operatives. He was to meet Carmony at the home of Daniel Hunter

—that was his instruction. Probably the banker was not to know he would be contacted there until he actually set foot in Daniel Hunter's house. Hunter, first vice-president of Carmony's bank and a leader in the city's social whirl.

Methodically Tumulty tore the telegram to bits. The rest of the way he sat lost in deep thought. There was no suggestion about Steve Tumulty to mark him as one of the most valued G-men in a department that was building a reputation for unqualified success in its war on crime. In fact, his self-effacement was one of his best assets as a government operative, though there was about him an insouciant air, left from his reporter days.

The lights in the train came on as the locomotive plunged into the tunnel below Park Avenue. Steve watched the porter scurrying down the aisle, laden with luggage which he was stacking in a neat pile in the vestibule. He was thinking of Carmony. Though he had decided not to mention the telegram from Washington, there was no reason why he should not talk to the bank president.

SOMETHING evasive in the banker's manner made him curious. That Carmony would have information on a matter that was right now one of the department's headaches—the counterfeit money ring—would not surprise him, for an influential banker would have avenues of approach closed to most people.

When the Limited stopped in Grand Central Station, Steve stepped out. A long trickle of passengers dribbled out of the Pullmans, followed their redcaps to the main waiting room. But though Steve had been among the first out of the train and had been watching, he saw no sign of George Carmony.

The last of the passengers passed and Steve, with a shrug, was about to follow when he stiffened abruptly. A shrill scream jerked the muscles along his back.

That was a woman's scream, and it had come from one of the cars.

CHAPTER II

Clue Shy

As a storm breaks after an ominous prelude of silence, just as suddenly the platform, deserted a moment ago, roared with sound. Men turned from the exit and ran back. Redcaps dropped baggage; men shouted, dashed around; excited voices shrilled.

But the scream was not repeated.

Steve lunged into the open door of the car. The door of Drawing Room "A" was wide open. At the threshold stood a thoroughly frightened Negro porter, mouth agape, eyes rolling. Inside the room, his back to Steve and obscuring a view of the place, was the conductor. No woman was in evidence.

Steve pulled back his lapel, gave the merest glimpse of the tiny gold badge he carried, bundled the conductor to one side. What he saw inside the room brought a sharp intake of breath.

George Carmony sat in a corner of the wide seat, his head slumped to his chest, his arms dangling to his knees. A splotch of crimson showed on his shirt. His eyes, abnormally wide, were glaring, glassy. His lips, his chin were covered with blood.

"Good God!"

The exclamation was torn from Steve Tumulty's lips. He was pointing down to what lay on the floor of the car at Carmony's feet. He didn't pick it up, but he went down on one knee to get a closer view. A shudder chilled his frame.

It was a tongue—a human tongue, cut off from far back in the mouth.

Beside it lay a penciled sheet. Steve snatched it up. It was a hand-printed message, unsigned.

George Carmony will never talk again. G-men take warning.

Steve glanced from Carmony's slack head to the tongue that lay on the floor. That telegram he had received from Washington! The meaning of the severed tongue was terribly clear.

George Carmony had had some information to impart but now George Carmony, dead, was silent—forever.



FLINTY gleam was in Tumulty's eyes as he turned from the dead man, straightened up. The little muscles along his jaw were purposefully bunched.

"Where is she?" he snapped. "The woman who was screaming?"

The conductor looked puzzled. "I dunno. She was here a second ago."

The porter broke in: "Two gen'l'mun helped her outa the car, suh. Just after I come runnin'."

"Helped her? Where'd they go?"

"She looked like she fainted, so they took her into the station."

Tumulty turned on his heel, raced to the platform. The crowd had grown larger, and station detectives were on hand to hold it back. Flashing his badge, Steve Tumulty broke through the wedge. At the far end of the platform he saw two men with a girl between them hurrying to the exit.

"Hey!" he shouted, increasing his speed. "Wait!"

One of the men turned his head but with his hat pulled down low over his forehead, the G-man saw little of his face. The girl stopped short, as if she meant to run toward Tumulty. He saw the two men grab her arms, hustle her through the exit. But for a split second, he had had a glimpse of her face. Even at that distance, he could judge she was young and very beautiful. And vaguely, he had a notion that he ought to be able to attach a name to her face. Somewhere he had seen her before, although her name eluded him.

By the time he reached the exit, the trio were out of sight. Tumulty sped toward the automobile driveway. A wizened little cab driver threw open his door, but Tumulty waved him back. His eyes searched

the length of the sidewalk but the girl and the two men were gone.

"You!" spat out Tumulty. "Did you see a girl and two men come here just a second ago?"

The little cab driver nodded. "Yeah, but they got away like a streak o' light. I wuz thinkin' they'd be good fares, but—"

The G-man pounced on him. "They didn't take a cab?"

"Naw!" The cab driver shrugged. "There was a ritzy limousine waitin' for 'em."

"Didn't happen to notice the plates, did you?"

"Huh? No, I didn't."

"Could you describe the car?"

"Lord! What next? Well, sure, sorta. It was a big one. Closed job. Dark. A Lincoln or maybe a Cadillac. Hey, are you cops?"

Tumulty strode away. There was nothing to be got out of questioning the man further. That description would fit a thousand limousines. Yet the very presence of a waiting limousine was proof that the killing of Carmony had been carefully planned.

STRIDING along he was still tantalized by the feeling that the girl's face was familiar. But he could not place her.

Back in the Pullman death car, the station detectives had shooed the crowd away. The conductor and porter were answering questions. The police had been telephoned and were on their way over. Tumulty took over the questioning. He elicited from the conductor the startling information that the girl had occupied the drawing room with Carmony since the train had left Chicago.

"In whose name was the room reserved?" he asked.

The conductor pulled out a leather-bound book. "Here it is, sir. Drawing Room 'A,' reserved for George Carmony 'and party.' That's all I have. The girl was in the drawing room all the time. She had all her meals sent in. I don't believe I saw her more than once."

"What about Carmony? Did you see much of him?"

"Well, no. Not after he gave me the tickets."

"Did Mr. Carmony send any telegrams? Did he receive any?"

"Yas, suh!" The porter answered him. "I took one from him back at Ann Arbor. I remember 'cause I tripped in the aisle as I was comin' out with it. But he didn't get any. No suh."

"You tripped!" Tumulty snatched him up. "Tell me about it."

"Well, 'twasn't much. A man helped me up, I remember."

Tumulty's eyes gleamed. "Did you drop the telegram?"

The porter scratched his head. "Why, I reckon I did. Jest for a minute, sir. 'Nother man handed it to me."

"And took time enough to read it before you got it back!" the G-man grated. "Did you happen to notice to whom it was being sent?"

"Why—uh—no. That is—it was goin' to New York an'—an'—lemme see—to Mr. uh—Daniel, I think it was. Daniel—uh—"

"Hunter?" Tumulty supplied.

"Yas, suh! That's it. Daniel Hunter."

"H'm." Daniel Hunter, the man at whose house Steve had been instructed to contact Carmony.

"What about the killing?" he shot out. "Did you see anybody enter Mr. Carmony's drawing room?"

"Why, no, sir. I wasn't lookin' particular."

"H'm. Could you describe the two men who helped the girl out of the car?"

"Well," he scratched his head again. "I don't reckon so. It all happened so quick, an' when I saw that dead man that I sho' didn't think of lookin'."

With the arrival of an inspector of the Homicide Squad with a detail of four men, Tumulty made preparations to depart. He could accomplish nothing more here. In his mind he was certain his telegram from Washington was linked with Carmony's murder. So, too, was the telegram the banker had sent and which had been cleverly intercepted. It might

have shed much light on the case.

The girl? He was puzzled. She had been traveling with Carmony. She had run off the second he was murdered. Run off? He could not be certain. Perhaps she had been forced to accompany the two men. It was all guesswork on his part.

Half an hour later, he entered a down-at-heels building on the outskirts of the financial district. A rickety elevator deposited him on the sixth floor—the top. The building housed small businesses of diverse character. The door before which Tumulty paused gave no indication of what went on inside. There was no name on the frosted glass.

Yet inside the place was a hive of activity. From this place, the Eastern Headquarters of the Department of Justice, operated sleuths whose names were unknown to the general public but whose deeds thrilled a nation. Pledged to rid the country of crime, these men were a new type of detective to whom a new name—G-men—had been given.

Tumulty smiled a greeting to the young man who sat before a typewriter in the outer office, asked for the chief. A few moments later he was ushered into a small cubby-hole of an office in which sat a short, stocky man with unruly corn-colored hair, deep-set, unwavering blue eyes and a manner brisk and appraising. Glenn Beard, chief, Eastern field office, Division of Investigation, Department of Justice. He gave Steve Tumulty a firm handclasp, indicated a chair.

"Washington telephoned you were wired orders to contact George Carmony," he said, smiling. "Have you—so soon?"

Tumulty said gravely: "Wait till you hear!" Briefly he told of the banker's murder. When he spoke of the inhuman cutting out of Carmony's tongue, Beard's lips tightened grimly.

"And so," Tumulty finished, "if we can get that telegram to Daniel Hunter, or the identification of that girl, we'll have something to go on.

This much is certain. Whoever killed Carmony, didn't want him to talk. The note near his body proves that."

Beard drummed with his fingers on the desk top. Then abruptly his fingers balled into a fist and he leaned forward earnestly.

"Look here, Steve," he said. "I'm going to let you in on a secret. That counterfeit ring that's been flooding the country with false bills—you probably know it's the biggest ring that ever operated on this continent?"

"Sure. That's no secret."

Beard smiled. "It isn't," he agreed. "But this is. The Division of Investigation, of course, has no jurisdiction in counterfeit cases. That work belongs to the Treasury Department. But recently we were able to move in on the case under the National Bank and Federal Reserve Act, mainly under the embezzlement clauses."

"I don't see—" began Steve.

"You will!" Beard nodded. "For months, government operatives have been trying to get a line on the source from which the flood of counterfeit money issues. Last week"—he paused dramatically—"the counterfeit bills were tracked down as issuing *from the Second National Bank!*"

STEVE TUMULTY'S eyes flashed. "What!" he exclaimed.

"Surprised, huh? No more than were we. And that evidence permitted the G-men to enter the picture." He sighed. "We've worked hard since then, going along cautiously. Carmony has always been a highly respectable and respected man. Rich, he doesn't need to amass money by underhand methods. So naturally we at first thought the bills were being slipped through his bank without his knowledge.

"They're the cleverest counterfeits ever made—well-nigh perfect! Only microscopic investigation reveals the flaws. Especially when they're new, they look like the real article.

"So we gave Carmony the benefit of the doubt. But a few days ago one of his clerks, a chap named

Crowder, who does some work for us every so often in bank cases, overheard a telephone conversation between Carmony and some unknown. Carmony was ordering \$50,000 worth of the spurious bills!

"Get it? With his bank to slip the counterfeits out with the genuine ones, Carmony could make an untold fortune. We were about to come down on him when he called Washington two days ago and said he had information to give on the counterfeiting ring. He wouldn't come to us. He insisted he wanted a man to meet him at the home of Daniel Hunter, his vice-president, tonight, on his return from Chicago. You were the man selected."

"Then you think Carmony is in the counterfeiting gang," put in Tumulty thoughtfully. "And wanting to get out, he decided to rat?"

Beard shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine. We have no proof."

Tumulty stood up. "Well," he said decisively, "if we find the girl who came back from Chicago with him or the killers who cut out his tongue, we'll have the key to the whole puzzle and a chance to smash the counterfeits to boot." A grin wreathed his freckled face. "What say, do I get the job, or do I?"

Beard matched the grin. "It's yours, son. And good luck!"

CHAPTER III

Killer's Lair



TWENTY minutes after Steve Tumulty had left Beard, he had deposited his bags in the hotel apartment where he maintained a modest bachelor abode. Fifteen minutes after that he was in a taxicab, riding out to Riverdale to the

home of Daniel Hunter.

A conference with Hunter was of great importance. Steve wanted, too, to see the contents of the telegram

George Carmony had sent to Hunter from the death train.

The Hunter mansion was on one of Riverdale's finest residential streets. It was an imposing edifice, set well back from the avenue, surrounded by a broad lawn and reached by a gravel driveway that ended before a broad porch.

"Mr. Tumulty to see Mr. Hunter," Steve said when the door was opened by a butler.

The butler shook his head. "I'm sorry, but Mr. Hunter is in conference."

Steve pulled back his lapel, gave the man a glimpse of the gold badge of the Department of Justice. "Get him, buddy. This is important."

The butler hurried away, leaving the door partly open. Steve stepped into a broad hallway, closed the door behind him. A second or two later, the butler reappeared. Behind him was a grey-haired man of about fifty. Steve stepped forward.

"Mr. Hunter?" And as the other nodded, he said: "Tumulty's my name—Steve Tumulty. Special agent, Department of Justice. I want a talk with you."

Hunter caught his lower lip between his teeth. "Suppose you come in here, Mr. Tumulty. There's a Second National Bank directors' meeting in session in the library."

He led the way into a small study, closed the door. "I suppose," he said slowly, "you're here to see George Carmony. It's only half an hour since we heard he'd been murdered."

Tumulty was watching the man narrowly. Although the room was not hot, Daniel Hunter was sweating profusely. His forehead was beaded. His hands were trembling and in his eyes Tumulty identified fear.

"Have you any idea why he was killed?" Steve asked.

"Why—er—no," Hunter faltered, "none in the world."

Tumulty took a step forward, in a low, succinct tone.

"George Carmony was in touch with Washington," he said. "He

called officials there from Chicago, arranged to meet an agent here in your home tonight."

"Eh?" Hunter looked about nervously. "Why here?"

"I don't know. Apparently, Carmony had a reason. He sent you a telegram from the train. Did you receive it?"

"Telegram?" Hunter was pacing up and down as though to hide his growing excitement. "Why—no, I didn't."

Steve ground out: "If you're lying, Mr. Hunter—"

"Sir! Are you accusing me of lying? I—"

"All right. Calm down." Steve Tumulty tried a new tack. "Do you know why Carmony took that trip to Chicago?"

FOR the first time Hunter looked up straight into Steve's eyes. "I suppose he went on bank business—I can't be any more specific—loans and credits, I suppose, but I'm not sure."

"Would you mind if I met your bank's directors, Mr. Hunter?"

"Why, no, if you think they can help."

Hunter led the way. Following him, Steve noticed a photograph in a leather frame on a desk. It pictured a lovely young girl, in riding clothes on a magnificent mount. A single glimpse at that picture—and into Steve Tumulty's face flashed suppressed excitement, strain and fiery alertness. He stopped short.

"What an uncommonly pretty girl!" he exclaimed, his eyes riveted on Hunter's face as the latter turned his head about. "Who is she?"

Hunter said proudly: "That is my daughter, Paula."

Tingling all over, Steve merely said: "H'm. Stunner!"

And stunning, indeed, it was! For the face of the girl in the photograph was that of the young woman whom he glimpsed running away from the death Pullman! No wonder her face had seemed familiar. Steve had seen it many times in newspaper shots of society folk. And this girl, Paula Hunter, daughter of the Sec-

ond National's vice-president, had ridden in the Pullman with the murdered George Carmony!

"Gentlemen, this is Mr. Tumulty. He is a special agent sent to investigate Mr. Carmony's brutal murder."

Steve Tumulty's racing thoughts were sharply interrupted by Hunter's introduction. He found himself in a library where six men were seated. He met them in turn—Horace Johnson, Ralph Stewart, Andrew Englehart, Harvey Horgan and Richard Brady. With the exception of Brady, the bank's treasurer, they were all past fifty, white-haired or bald. Brady was a dark-haired, pleasant-faced man of about thirty. He gave Tumulty's hand a firm clasp.

"I'm glad you're here," he said earnestly. "We were shocked beyond words by Carmony's murder. Anything we can do to help you find the culprits we'll be glad to do."

Tumulty muttered something, letting his eyes dart over the group. In his mind was the germ of a brilliant plan. In the law-trained G-man, there is a high regard for tamper-proof evidence that amounts to a passion. It was such evidence Tumulty laid plans to garner. Several facts were already fixed as certainties in his clicking brain. He needed only corroborative proof. Hunter's queer reticences about the telegram; Hunter's daughter traveling with Carmony; the board of directors' meeting here in Hunter's home—all these facts pointed but one way.

He began quietly: "I was a passenger on the train on which Carmony met his death. I spoke to him before he was murdered!"

He paused, but nobody stirred.

"I mean to mention things in confidence," he went on, "which I hadn't meant to divulge until this case is completed. I haven't told my superiors yet. You are the first to hear. I have, however, set everything down in a report which will be delivered to Washington should anything happen to me—George Carmony told me the name of the man who—"

Daniel Hunter, round face flushed, his eyes flaring, cried very hoarsely:

"What man? What are you talking about?"

"— has been making it possible to slip in counterfeit bills with the bank's genuine money!"

A bomb could not have created greater furore. Everybody was suddenly talking excitedly. With tingling amazement, they regarded Tumulty's grave face, asking questions that he disregarded. At last Richard Brady managed to make himself heard above the hubbub.

"Who is this man, Mr. Tumulty? Name him!"

Steve merely grinned. "Sorry, Brady. I've already told you more than I intended. To reveal too much now may impede the efforts of the Department of Justice which I have the honor to represent."

"Just a moment!" ejaculated Horace Johnson, a shrewd-faced man whose fleshy features were vividly flushed. "We—er—have a right to know what Carmony confided to you. The bank—"

Steve shook his head. "I cannot tell you his name just now. In a few short hours, however, special agents will unmask him. Thank you, gentlemen, for your attention. Good night!"

He nodded briskly to Hunter and left the room. In the hall, he smothered a smile as he strode out of the door to the street.

Four blocks down he entered a drug-store, went into a phone booth, and called a number.

"That you, Beard?" he said, after a short wait. "Tumulty reporting. I've just come from Hunter's home. Listen! The girl who was with Carmony in the drawing room Pullman was Paula Hunter, Daniel Hunter's daughter! Yes! Of course, I'm positive. And get this, guy! I've just dropped a bomb-shell in Hunter's living room. Meeting of board of directors there. Yeah! My plan? Well, it's old stuff, but good for another try. Yeah, I figure if you can't find your way to a criminal, make him come to you. I—"

The words died in his throat.

The door of the booth had been

suddenly pushed in. Two men were facing him with leveled guns. One was tall, hard-faced; a cruel gash of a mouth twisted in hate. The other was small, dapper-looking, expressionless. The .45 automatic he held in his hand looked big and murderous.

"Make a sound," the tall man said, "and it's curtains for you!"

He reached into the booth, and snatched the receiver from Steve Tumulty's hand, forked it on the hook. Without warning, he swung his gun at the special agent's head.

Tumulty jerked his head to one side. He avoided the blow, parted his lips to shout. But no sound came. For the small man had leaped forward, his weapon raised shoulder-high. He, too, swung. The booth was too narrow to permit maneuvering. Tumulty could not dodge.

His eyes were blinded by a great flash of white light. Simultaneously, he felt a crushing pain at the top of his head. Then he collapsed in blackness.

CHAPTER IV

Snatch Victim



CONSCIOUSNESS returned to Steve Tumulty by slow degrees. For a while he lay in a complete stupor though his eyes were wide open. Then the violent pounding in his head made him sit up. The floor beneath him was damp and

clammy. He touched it—cement. So he was in a pitch dark cellar!

His head swam dizzily as if he had been a victim of nausea, and his limbs felt weak.

But he was still alive. Why? Those two men in the phone booth were not the sort to stop at a little thing like murder. Killers, both of them. Yet he was alive.

He tottered to his feet; listened. Above, he heard faint sounds of feet, murmurings of conversation. He

floundered about in the dark until he found a staircase.

Step by step he went up, careful to test each board before he trusted his weight on it. At the top, a heavy door stopped him. He put his ear to the keyhole. The voices, though still faint, became clear and distinct.

An impatient one demanded: "It's dangerous to have a G-man here. What we waitin' for?"

"For orders, stupid." That would be the tall man with cruel slit of a mouth. "He won't get away so quick, he won't!"

"Gawd," a thin voice said sullenly, "them G-men's poison to mugs like us! Why didn't we put the rods to him an' finish him off?"

"Oh, yeah!" This was the tall man again. "You guys is gettin' brighter'n a new dime! What about the stuff he wrote down—that report that gets sent to Washington should he be rubbed out? Who's gonna tell us where to find it, if he don't? Answer me that, huh?"

EVERY nerve in Steve Tumulty's body was a-tingle. His plan had worked! That was why he had not been killed outright. These men dreaded the report he had said would go to Washington. They would torture him to reveal where he had hidden it.

He grinned ruefully. His plan had worked, but here he was a prisoner, unable to make capital of it. Still one thing was revealed to him. All his talk at Daniel Hunter's home of George Carmony's having revealed to him the name of a man responsible for the counterfeiting, of having written a report of the whole thing was a fake. But he had not mentioned such a written report anywhere else.

That proved beyond a doubt that the "brains" of this counterfeiting gang was present at the board of directors meeting in Daniel Hunter's home!

Just as quietly, he slipped down the stairs again, feeling for matches, but found they had been taken along

with his gun, knife, watch and badge. He had no illusions about those men up above. If he told them he had been lying, that he had never written down any report, that he did not know the name of the man responsible for the counterfeiting—they would not allow him to go free.

No! The men who murdered George Carmony would not falter in killing even a G-man. With a horrible sense of certainty, Tumulty knew he had nothing to look forward to but—death! Unless—

He started an exploratory tour of the cellar. There might be some way of getting out. He found a short flight of stone steps but a trap door ended them. Strain as he might, he could not lift that door. There was a single window but it was heavily barred and a dark cloth had been hung across the pane. Escape was impossible.

However, he found something else, something that made his lips tighten grimly. In a corner of the cellar was a huge machine. Though he could not see it, Tumulty could guess its purpose. His fingers touched levers, springs, smooth surfaces of metal. A machine for printing money! Beside it was another, more compact. A photographic outfit! By combining the two, printing and photography, the counterfeiters were able to produce their amazing bogus money.

Tumulty was careful not to touch the machines too much lest he smudge fingerprints. When these machines were found, the G-men would gleam from them every print. And fingerprints were evidence juries could not disregard! He went down to his knees, his hands moving restlessly. The cement floor ended and that damp earth met his touch. There was purpose in that.

Machines running on concrete would make the whole building vibrate; loose earth would act as a tremor-absorber.

He jerked his head about suddenly, remained crouched. Something had moved over to his right!

He crawled forward on hands and

knees, stopped. He put forth a hand tentatively, jerked back.

He had touched warm human flesh! But there was no further movement. Again he ventured an explorative hand—and a bitter oath escaped him. He bent over a limp, inert body.

Quickly, he fumbled for the hands, found them bound behind the back by thick ropes. He got them loose, freed the bonds from the ankles, laid his fingers on the face. It was gagged and blindfolded, the form was that of a young girl. She moaned feebly and he helped her to sit up.

"It's all right now, Miss Hunter," he whispered. "Don't make any noise. I'm a friend."

"Oh! Oh! What—"

"You are Miss Hunter, aren't you?" he asked. "Miss Paula Hunter?"

"Y-yes! Who are you?"

"Steve Tumulty, a G-man!"

She caught her breath. "Where are we? This horrible darkness! I can't—"

"Take it easy," he advised. "And listen. You accompanied George Carmony from Chicago to New York. When he was murdered you ran off with the two men who probably had killed him. Why?"

A shudder shook her and she began silently to weep. "I—they told me my father was in a limousine waiting and that if I did not come without a fuss, they'd kill him. I knew they meant it because they were the same men who held me prisoner in Chicago!"

"Your father was not in the limousine though, was he?"

"No. As soon as we got in, they chloroformed me."

In the darkness, Tumulty's eyes flashed fire. "Let me get this straight, Miss Hunter," he said. "You were kidnaped in New York and taken to Chicago?"

"No," the girl corrected. "They kidnaped me in Chicago. I was visiting Dick's relatives. Someone phoned for me to meet Dick's sister near Michigan Boulevard. When

I got there, three men overpowered me. I don't remember where we went or what happened until Mr. Carmony came for me to take me home. I imagined he and father had paid the ransom money."

"Dick?" asked Tumulty sharply. "Dick who?"

"Why, Dick Brady. He's cashier and treasurer of the bank. We're engaged."

AGAIN Tumulty's eyes gleamed but he said nothing. There was a short pause, then both were electrified by the sound of footsteps approaching from above.

"Listen!" whispered Tumulty, fiercely. "They'll be coming down for me any second. We've got to get out or they'll murder us both." He grasped the girl firmly by the shoulders. "How's your nerve?"

"All—all right, I guess."

"Fine! A plan's been running through my head. It's desperate, maybe crazy, but we've no time to think up anything elaborate. They think I'm still out cold and that you're gagged and bound. We'll let 'em think so. I'll lie on the floor. You go over and get behind the staircase. When they come down and bend over me, you slip up those stairs and get out to the street. I don't care how—*get there!* Make for the nearest phone booth and call Huntsford 3—7676. Get it? Huntsford 3—7676. Get Glenn Beard. Tell him who you are, tell him I sent you and for God's sake tell him the street and house number of this dump. He'll know what to do. Now get over there. Fast! And remember, everything depends on you!"

He broke off as the door up above opened cautiously. The girl slipped away from him in the darkness and he moved over to the machines, lay down in the soft earth.

His eyes opened to mere slits, he could see a ribbon of light issuing from a flash on the staircase. Behind the flash came four or five men. He was hoping they would all come down because if they left a guard stationed above, Paula Hunter would

be intercepted and his plan would fail.

The faint glow of the flashlight revealed one man a little ahead of the others. He was obviously well dressed. His face was hidden by a mask. The "brains" of the counterfeiting gang!

Steve Tumulty lay rigidly tense, unstimulating, his brain racing madly—

Then the beam of the flashlight was resting on him. His eyes closed. Voices were whispering:

"We can put a lighted cigar against his blinkers. He'll talk then!" The suggestion was followed by a hollow laugh.

"Let me—" That was the voice of the leader, cautious, guarded.

"Boss!" That was a bellow, not a whisper, uttered in terrified amazement. "The skirt—she's gone!"

The others whirled around to poke the flashlight's beam in all corners. And at that instant, Steve acted.

With the spring of a mountain cat, he leaped up from the floor. He flew at the masked leader with hands clenched into fists, driving furiously! The man, half-turned about, was utterly unprepared. He gasped aloud, recoiled.

"Packy! Joel!" he screamed.

But before the others could come to his assistance, Steve's driving fists had flung him down to the soft earth.

CHAPTER V

The Law Triumphs



WHATEVER else happened to him now, Steve was at least assured that his sudden attack on the leader would cover any noise made by Paula Hunter in slipping up the stairs.

The attention of the men was centered only on him. In the dark, with their leader menaced, they did not dare go for their guns. They went for Steve with fists. One jumped on his back and he was borne down by

sheer weight. Instantly, the others piled on top and fists smashed into his face. He managed to wriggle free enough to get to his knees.

One of the men kicked viciously at his jaw but he ducked, stopped the blow with his shoulder. Then he flung himself forward in a savage football tackle, got his arms around legs, heaved. Bodies tumbled down on him. He got a hand against a jaw, balled his fingers into fists, slammed into the jaw with his whole weight behind the punch. There was a gasp, a groan and a body went limp. He fumbled frantically for a gun in the man's clothing, but hands tore at his face, his shoulders, pulled him away.

He tried to direct his attack again at the masked leader but the man was on his feet a little distance away, dancing excitedly, gun in hand, ready to shoot as soon as Tumulty worked clear.

Then an idea hit the leader explosively and he shouted: "We've got to get out of here, guys! If that girl got away, she'll call the cops! The dump's all rigged for the get-away and the dynamite's planted. We'll leave the G-boy to see how he likes dynamite! When the building's wrecked, they won't have a chance to trace us!"

His words acted like magic. A shout went up from the men. Fighting clear of Tumulty, they raced for the stairs. The leader was already halfway up.

Steve leaped after them. He caught the outflung arm of one man, wrenched away his flashlight. A gun boomed from above him and something hot and searing tore along his shoulder, half-spun him around. Another bullet just missed him, ricocheted off the cement floor. Then the door to the cellar closed with a bang. Steve was alone. His hand still held the flashlight. Its probing beam picked out the form of the man he had knocked unconscious.

Upstairs, footsteps raced across the floor. Then suddenly the house was silent. Frantically, Steve raced up the stairs, hammered at the door,

It would not budge. He was a prisoner here, with dynamite due to explode any second! And he had no idea where to find the fuse!

A hell of a way to cash in—trapped like a rat in a cellar! The flash's narrow beam picked out the counterfeiting machinery. He saw the loose earth on which it rested. It was red clay—

Queer how his mind was working in this last minute. The machinery would be destroyed by the explosion but the red clay—

He flung his body toward it, twisting and rolling, to get off the concrete. The ground under him suddenly heaved and buckled—he was lifted high in the air, slammed against the red clay floor. He was not conscious of seeing flame but the air was hot and shimmering and a paralyzing burst of heat burnt hair, eyebrows, flesh. He flung himself down violently, lay still. He had lost consciousness.

How long he was out, he never knew; he opened his eyes, could see nothing and thought he was blind. Gradually the shocked optic nerves reasserted themselves and he could see clouds of plaster dust, shattered splinters, a gaping hole in the ceiling above him. Faces were peering down. Beard and— He waved a hand feebly.

A voice cried: "It's Tumulty! He's alive!"

Tumulty grated hoarsely: "Alive—an' kicking, you fool! Come down an' get me outa here!"

He relapsed into darkness again, awoke to find Glenn Beard bending over him. Beard was grinning. He said:

"You got no hair on your head or eyebrows. Your clothes are torn to rags. Your shoulder's busted by a bullet, but you're alive. And that's what counts!"

"Is it?" Tumulty sat up with a grimace. He was seated in the back of a car, parked a little way from the dynamited house. "I didn't get my man. That's what counts with me! Did the girl phone you?"

"Paula Hunter? Yes! I told her

to go on to her father's house. We rushed here but the building had already busted wide open. Now what do we do with you, take you to a hospital?"

"Not on your life!" Tumulty snorted indignantly. "I'm all right. Just need—a cigarette to steady my nerves!"

"Some nerves!" Beard chuckled. Then seriously: "Tell me about it, Steve, old man," he said a little huskily.

Briefly, Tumulty reported the gist of his amazing experience. "And it was all worth while," he finished. "I've got the whole set-up clear in my mind. We're sure of one thing. Over at Daniel Hunter's home tonight was a man who is the 'brains' of the gang. Now listen! I've got a plan!"

Quickly, he related it while Beard's eyes glowed approval. "All right," said Beard. "I can get Hunter to assemble them again. But how will you identify him?"

"Never mind that. Just do as I say."

HALF hour later with the wound in his shoulder dressed and his clothes changed, and the little matter of a phone call attended to, Tumulty felt better. He was still shaky, but a shrewd smile gleamed in his narrowed eyes. Seated with Beard in the rear of a racing Government car, he let the wind's coolness ease the mad throbbing in his head.

The car moved across the city to the quieter stretches of Riverdale. Before the porch of Daniel Hunter's home, it came to a stop. Instantly the door of the house flung open and in the light, Hunter, himself, stood outlined.

He grabbed Tumulty's good hand, pumped it up and down. "I don't know how I'm going to thank you," he said, deeply moved. "I didn't play fair with you. I didn't tell you my daughter had been kidnaped. But I didn't dare tell you. They would have killed her if they thought I'd informed the authorities."

Paula was standing behind her father, supported by dark-haired Richard Brady.

"Are all the directors here?" Beard asked crisply.

Hunter nodded, puzzled. "Yes. I phoned them as soon as you called me. Had to drag some of them out of bed. Why—"

"Never mind!" Beard said peremptorily. "Come along, Steve."

In the drawing room were gathered the same men who Tumulty had met earlier in the evening. He stood in the center of the room with Beard at his side, a peculiar glint in his eyes, his expression hard and uncompromising. A hush fell on the room. Everyone was waiting for him to speak. He did without any superfluous words.

"I know who murdered George Carmony! I know who planned the kidnaping of Miss Hunter! I know which of you gentlemen is the leader of the counterfeiting gang!"

There were gasps—then utter, thick silence. It was broken at last by Hunter.

"Who?" he asked shakily.

"I'll name him in a moment," Tumulty snapped. "Let me outline the case first. The man who planned the kidnaping of Miss Hunter and the passing of the bogus money through your bank is right here in this room. He was in touch with a counterfeiting gang who were impressed with his daring plan to slip their fake money through a bank. To coerce the bank's directors, from the president down, he had Miss Hunter kidnaped. Not for ransom, mind you, but to force the bank's executives to do as he bid! This went on for nearly a month until he was prevailed upon to accept ransom for Miss Hunter's deliverance.

"George Carmony went out to Chicago to get Miss Hunter. The gang found out, however, that he meant to reveal the whole plot to the G-men as soon as he got back to New York. That's why he was murdered and Miss Hunter kidnaped all over again. As soon as I found that the fake money was being routed

through the Second National, I knew for a certainty that the board of directors were fully aware of it, but were powerless to do anything. Then I learned that it was because Miss Hunter's life was being held always in the balance. When I stood here, gentlemen, and told you I had been told the name of the man behind the whole thing—I was lying. Carmony never told me. I merely did it to draw the scoundrel into the open.

"He swallowed my bait. I was taken prisoner, held in the gang's hideout. The leader faced me down in the cellar. There were counterfeiting machines there, resting on a base of red clay— When I got out of that cellar, the soles of my shoes were stained with it. Gentlemen, we must request you to show us the soles of your shoes. Everyone!"

For a second no one spoke. G-men stood before every window, every door. Slowly each man lifted first one foot, then another, stared down at the soles.

"You, too, Mr. Brady."

The treasurer was standing next to Paula Hunter. He hesitated, then lifted one foot. There was a slight discoloration on the sole.

TUMULTY nodded. "All right. Mr. Brady. You're 'it.' You can't deny your shoes are streaked with the telltale clay."

"Wh-what!"

"You're the man!" said Tumulty in a low, tense tone. "You're the rat who sacrificed Miss Hunter to your greed for money. You were engaged to her. You arranged for her to visit your sister in Chicago. You—"

"Are you—are you mad, Tumulty?"

"Am I?"

"Good heavens, I—"

"The clay adhering to the shoe leather on your foot can be analyzed," said Steve. "When it is, it will match exactly with the clay in the cellar of your gang's hideout. We'll take your fingerprints. You thought you'd destroyed all evidence by dynamiting the hideout. But there will be fingerprints on bits of wood, on glass. Indestructible evi-

dence. We'll find your prints will match with those from the hideout. And—have you forgotten the phone call?"

Richard Brady stared, open-mouthed.

"Y-you!" he said sibilantly. "You!"

Tumulty nodded. "Yes, it was I called your apartment—right after I got away from that house you dynamited, leaving me—as you thought—in little pieces. Remember our conversation? Two Government stenographers recorded it. It was witnessed by three men. Remember I cried: 'Boss, this is Packy!' Packy is one of your men. He's being picked up right now. So is Joe—Joe Tetramini and the others who run around with Joe and Packy. Our records on counterfeit gangs like yours are complete. Before morning, we'll have every one of them. I said over the phone: 'The G-heat's turned on us. We're too hot to hide anywhere. What must I do?' Remember what you answered, Brady? You cursed, you ranted: 'Don't lose your head! I got you into this. I'll get you out. Trust me and lay low.' I hung up abruptly. I suppose you wondered why Packy acted so oddly. Well, now you know— That clay on your shoes is corroborative evidence. I wanted all these men here to see it, to know for themselves, aside from my stenographic records. You might deny it was your voice that spoke to me. Here you have proof positive you were in that cellar where you kept the counterfeit-

ing outfit. Richard Brady, in the name of the law, I arrest!"

Steve stopped. Brady had made a swift movement for his pocket. Beard leaped forward with a shout. A gun flashed in Brady's hand as Beard catapulted into him. They fell to the floor, rolled over. But Beard had leaped a second too late. A gun shot roared.

Richard Brady's body went suddenly limp!

When Tumulty rushed forward, blood was pouring from Brady's lips. Tumulty knelt beside him.

"Carmony!" he said fiercely. "Who killed him? Tell us!"

Brady's lips writhed. "Go to hell!" he whispered. A bestial grin covered his blood-stained lips. He shrugged. "I'm not afraid to talk. Who cares? Packy murdered Carmony."

He shuddered once; lay still.

Tumulty got to his feet slowly. "You all heard him name the murderer. You're witnesses." He turned to Beard. "The case is complete. We've got all the evidence we need."

The phone rang and Beard answered it. When he hung up, there was a smile on his face. "Packy and a man named Delman were picked up at the Newark Airport."

Tumulty had slithered down to the floor. "Tired," he murmured. "Need sleep."

Beard looked down at him, grinning. "Poor kid! He's been going on nerve alone. Well, we won't let him back in the office until his hair grows back on his head."

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Escape Was Sure—Once Shawm Eradicated the

Damned Spot

By BARRY BRANDON

Author of "The Lens Murder," "Brass Knuckles," etc.



THAT murder would result was a thing Shawm had not reckoned upon. Burline had owed him the money for six years; and each time Shawm came to collect it, Burline put him off with a litany of hardships and handicaps which were as infuriating to Shawm as the sight of the man—as the debt itself.

As he drove out of San Jose, his anger grew in anticipation of the inevitable result of his call. Shawm, a professional Shylock in a city of small usurers, made it a rule to collect every debt to the penny, plus interest—which often amounted to more than a thousand percent.

It was night when he arrived at Burline's cottage. There was a light in the kitchen window. Shawm knocked and was admitted. Burline began at once to plead his poverty. He tried to smile.

"Come in, Mr. Shawm," he invited. "I haven't got much—but there's always a cup of tea. Sometimes, for weeks at a time, there's almost nothing in the house but—"

"Can it, can it, for the love of Pete, will you?" growled Shawm. "I didn't come here to listen to excuses. I've heard 'em all. What I want to know is, are you going to give me my dough?"

He had entered the kitchen, but refused the chair to which Burline had mutely invited him. His eyes glared, and the corners of his lips

were already flecked with spittle from his breathless anger. Burline played for sympathy. He was a poor man, he said. But he didn't get far on that tack. Shawm cut in harshly on every excuse.

"But, after all," Burline said justly, "I paid off the original debt. You've had your money back long ago—except for the interest—"

"What's this?" demanded Shawm, his fury rising to the roots of his hair, to the whitened knuckles of his fists. "What's that you say? Are you trying to tell me that you don't owe me any money? Is that it?"

"But—you'll have to admit—" began the other feebly, retreating before Shawm's rage.

"I won't admit nothin', you dead-beat!" cried Shawm, and snatched up a knife from the table. There was an insane glitter in his eyes from which Burline shrank with fear. He was elderly, feeble from a protracted pulmonary condition. In his desperation he snatched up a stick from the basket of kindling.

"You're going to pay," fumed Shawm, "or I'll carve it out of your throat."

Knife upraised dagger-fashion in his gloved hand, he advanced; and Burline, hardly knowing what he was doing, struck out in self-defense. Shawm parried the blow, flung the stick away. It shattered the single light bulb, sprinkling fine splinters in a shower. The room was now in darkness, rendered more habitable for the brief sojourn of Death.

Malleting his fist, Shawm plunged the knife with all his force into Bur-

line's throat. There was a bubbling cry, and Shawm stepped back from the sudden gush of blood. It messed his gloved hand, and he felt its warm, wet, terrifying stickiness as it soaked through. The room was suddenly a place of loathing, and he fled.

SECURE at last in his apartment, Shawm examined himself minutely. He burned his gloves, and scoured his bloodstained hand. Then he found that his hat was sprinkled with a myriad particles of glass from the smashed bulb. Some adhered to the soft nape of his overcoat. He went outdoors and brushed himself with a superfluity of thoroughness. But when he inspected his overcoat further, he discovered a horrifying thing—a spot of blood!

With frantic haste he got soap and water and did not rest until the surface of that cloth was clean of guilt—until the keenest eye could not trace the existence of that damned spot.

Shawm knew that he would be questioned eventually. The debt was known. He would be among the first suspected. But he had scrubbed himself free of all appearance of guilt. A useful thing now would be an alibi.

There was Plangent, who owned the poolroom down the block. The man was indebted to him—and here was an opportunity for easy settlement.

"It'll wipe your slate clean," Shawm told Plangent within that half hour, "if—"

And the deal was closed then and there.

Late the next morning there was a knock on Shawm's door. Shawm, clad in his dressing gown, let the caller in. Prepared for any eventuality, he was not alarmed at the sight of the gold badge he was shown.

"Fellow found stabbed over in Costa Real—name of Burline," the detective said. "He owed you money. Got any notions about it, Shawm?"

"Dead, is he?" groaned Shawm.

"The only notion I got is, who's goin' to pay me the money he owes me?"

"Where were you last night?"

"Last night? Why, I was shootin' some pool with Plangent down the block. I was there since about nine."

The detective began to look around the apartment. He lingered over the scattered clothing, but Shawm didn't mind. The detective occupied himself for several minutes, and he seemed especially interested in Shawm's overcoat, and in his trousers. Finally he said:

"Get into something and come along. I'll carry these pants—and the overcoat."

Shawm grinned.

"What do you call this?" he wanted to know.

"Murder," said the detective. "There's a spot of blood on this overcoat—"

"Spot of blood! But I—you're crazy!"

"You tried to wash it out, I know. You got the surface cleaned swell. But you washed the blood *through*—right through into the lining. Look."

It was so. White of face, Shawm stammered:

"That's not blood. It's—I don't know what it is—"

"The chemists'll let you know what it is," the detective assured him. "If it's blood, and if it's Burline's blood—he was tubercular—the analysis will show it. Another thing, Shawm. A bulb was smashed in the struggle. How are you going to explain the splinters of glass I found inside the cuffs of your pants?"

His mind numb, his hands limp, Shawm let the detective's steel take its fateful double bite about his wrists. His one last card was the alibi. But this popped asunder with the same shattering consequences of the bulb at Burline's cottage.

"What have I got to lose?" chuckled the poolroom owner when the matter came up for trial. "If Shawm gets the noose, death'll wipe the debt off my slate. That's easier for me than perjury."

And he related how Shawm had fixed the alibi.

Ten POUNDS of NAILS



"They're taking to the bottom!" Durward yelled. "Too yellow to fight!"

***The Killers Use a New and Devilish Weapon to
Shunt the Law's Pursuit—but Trooper
Buzzy Peters Fights Fire With Fire in a
Thrill-Jammed Duel With Death!***

By CHARLES MOLYNEUX BROWN

Author of "Painful Dentistry," "The Blades," etc.

YOUNG Hugh Prewitt was not only an ambitiously inclined hardware clerk, but he possessed also a lively bump of curiosity and an imagination easily stirred. The customer he was waiting on had

aroused both the curiosity and the imagination.

Snapping the stout cord he had just tied about a paper sack bundle with a dexterous twist of his fingers, he carried the bulky parcel up to the

front of the store where the customer waited.

"How about some cement, for the seams and valleys?" he inquired briskly.

"Huh?" Pale eyes that had hard, glassy irises stared at him blankly. "Naw. This is all I want. How much?"

"Seventy cents, please." Hughy took the proffered dollar bill, rang up the sale and handed over the change with a polite, "Thank you!"

When the customer had hurried out of the store, the clerk skipped to the show window and watched to see where the man would go.

There was something queer about him. The collegiate cut of his clothes and the checkered cap with the long visor didn't match up with the chiseled, hard face and those funny eyes.

Eyes that had given Hughy a jumpy feeling when they'd rested on him unblinkingly.

The fellow angled across the broad, paved street that was Roseborough's main thoroughfare as well as the arterial highway running eastward across the state. Roseborough was a tidy little town just beyond the borough limits of Bluff City, really a shopping community for suburban residents living out that way.

Hugh saw the chap hand the parcel to a man in the rear of a rakish, powerful-looking touring car parked across the street, and then climb into the front seat beside the driver. The driver wore a cap, too, and Hugh couldn't get a good look at his face.

The touring car was parked just at the beginning of a hydrant zone, the front wheels cocked out from the curb for a ready turn into traffic.

The clerk stared hard at the car. The rear license plate was dust-grimed, but the combination of colors told him it was an out of state license.

Three buildings beyond the parked touring car was a corner building, housing the Roseborough branch of a Bluff City bank. In just about two minutes it would be nine o'clock, and

the bank would open for the day's business.

Hughy's late customer had bought ten pounds of flat-headed, sharp-pointed, small roofing nails. A lot of nails, Hugh had thought, weighing them out. And the chap hadn't remotely resembled a roofer! He hadn't even understood the purposes of roofing cement when Hugh had made the suggestion.

He took another long look at the touring car. The two in the front seat were slouched low. Hugh saw the chap in the checkered cap raise a thin wrist and glance at a strap watch.

The clerk galloped back to the rear of the store and with shaking fingers thumbed a telephone directory to the page listing the number of the State Police Barracks, about a mile and a half from Roseborough.

SERGEANT BUSBY PETERS—
"Buzzy" Peters to his buddies on the State Police and to most people who knew him well—was tightening some small nuts on the mud guard of his motorcycle when Captain Correll summoned him to the telephone.

Wiping his hands clean on a bit of old rag, the sergeant hurried into the barracks office and picked up the phone. When he called "Hello," an excited voice began bubbling in his ear.

Buzzy Peters' sandy brows cocked high as he listened, his blue eyes quizzical and a bit amused.

"Okay, kid, I'll bleeze by and look 'em over," he promised, ending the conversation. He grinned at the captain when he cradled the phone.

"That was Hugh Prewitt, a lad I know who clerks in a hardware store over in Roseborough," the sergeant explained. "He's all of a-twitter about some guys parked in a car across from the store. Says they bought enough roofing nails to lay a square mile of shingles and he thinks they're going to stick up the bank!"

The captain stared. Then glanced at the wall clock. The hands stood at one minute past nine o'clock.

"Maybe the guy's got a hunch!" There was no amusement in his tones. "You hustle over there, Sergeant! Take young Saunders along with you. He's to travel under your wing for seasoning, anyhow."

Buzzy Peters hustled out to his motorbike. Nearby, husky pink-cheeked Toby Saunders, a rookie who'd been wearing his uniform hardly long enough to get oil spots on it, was going over his machine with an oily rag. When Toby wasn't riding, he was wearing out the motorbike by polishing it.

"Fork your bike, Saunders!" the sergeant ordered curtly. "We got a job!"

He straightened his own machine off the stand, straddled it, and kicked the motor alive. He had roared the length of a block before Toby Saunders caught up with him and matched his pace. The rookie grinned, vastly pleased to be on a job with the stocky trooper, whose record was a tradition on the State Police.

Just before the street along which they were spinning joined the Bristol highway, a freight train shunted a cut of cars along the track paralleling the highway, blocking the crossing.

At the same moment, the wailing of a siren smote their ears above the rattle of the slowly moving box cars. Over the tops of the cars they could see the edge of the highway where their street climbed up a ramp to the dump, beyond the railroad.

A BLUFF CITY prowl car whirled past, wide open, in the direction of Roseborough.

Buzzy Peters cursed the slowly moving freight train, that hadn't cleared the crossing by more than half its length.

"Get ready for business, Saunders!" he shouted to the rookie. "There's trouble ahead!"

He unbuttoned the flap of his belt holster. The rookie, noting, did the same and his face went a little sober. Both of them crouched tensely, awaiting the moment when they could go.

The time came. Saunders, attempting to keep pace with the sergeant, almost had a spill careening into the turn when they roared up the ramp onto the highway. He wasn't the seasoned rider that Buzzy Peters was.

There was a crowd milling before the branch bank building when they roared into Roseborough. People were running across the street and even their screaming sirens hardly cleared the way. The alarm bell outside the bank building was clamoring frenziedly and there was no sign of the police prowl car.

Hugh Prewitt came running from the sidewalk as the pair came to a screaming stop. His arms were waving and his eyes snapping with excitement.

"They stuck up the bank, Buzzy! Those guys I told you about!" he yapped. "They beat it east in that Packard touring car. Shot the teller, and they say he's dead! The police car took out after them!"

"Thanks, Hugh!" Buzzy Peters' jaw tightened grimly. He raised his foot from the pavement and opened up the throttle, starting his siren again to clear the way. Beside him, Toby Saunders' bike leaped ahead.

"Watch out for those roofing nails!" Hugh Prewitt shouted after them, but in the roar of starting, the significance of the warning scarcely impressed Buzzy Peters.

Once out of Roseborough, the needle of the speedometer on the sergeant's bike climbed to seventy, crept on to eighty-five and trembled there. The ribbon of concrete pavement unwound beneath his wheels in a blur. Wind roared about his ears as he crouched low over the handle bars.

The highway now cut straight over a series of hills; long climbs and sweeping dips. Topping the second of the long rises he caught sight of the scudding police car, doing its best at seventy, skimming over the crown of the next hill.

Buzzy Peters left the rooky yards behind tearing down that slope and up the next rise. Roaring over the hill he sighted the police car again,

just about to reach the concrete bridge over a creek running through the level stretch.

An exultant exclamation escaped the sergeant as he glimpsed a second car climbing the slope beyond the bridge. It didn't seem to be going so fast, and he saw that it was a touring car.

And then, as he swooped toward the bridge, he saw the police car begin a weird snake dance on the pavement. Weaving and swaying as the driver fought the wheel. Just as the bridge was reached the police car turned completely over and crashed into the concrete parapets guarding the bridge.

Buzzy Peters' stomach went sick as he braked savagely. At that speed, with a crack up like that, death was riding the police car!

He sprang from his mount, put the bike on the prop and ran to the upside down, battered prowler car.

The limp, uniform clad body of one of the patrolmen lay huddled against the parapet, flung clear of the car at the impact. When he saw that crushed skull, Buzzy Peters' averted his eyes quickly. Instinct told him the man couldn't be alive.

He stooped to peer beneath the overturned car. The body of the second patrolman—the driver—was crushed and twisted about the remains of the steering wheel. One look and Buzzy Peters knew that the man was beyond human aid.

Cursing, he straightened, white-faced and ill.

Where was Toby Saunders? The rookie hadn't shown up. He couldn't be that far behind, unless he'd had a spill. The sergeant stepped clear of the wreck for a look up the highway.

The rookie was coming, all right, but the way his bike lurched and swerved on the pavement made the watcher dizzy!

Toby had a flat and was gamely risking his fool neck pushing on to join Buzzy Peters. It was then that the sergeant remembered what it was that Hugh Prewitt had shouted after them, leaving Roseborough.

He stared about the floor of the bridge. A little beyond the wreck of the police car the concrete was strewn with roofing nails, many of them standing on their broad, flat heads, dagger points menacingly upward.

Swearing savagely, Buzzy Peters bounded to examine the twisted, torn and shapeless remnants of rubber and fabric that had been tires on the prowler car. Only one tire was intact, the left rear wheel shoe. The others were torn and smoking from heat friction.

A moment's search and he found roofing nails embedded in one of the front tires. The air had left those tires with almost the suddenness of a blowout. The driver hadn't had a chance to get control at that speed!

Toby Saunders reached the bridge at last, a rear tire flapping dismally.

"Picked up something and got a flat, Sarge!" he shouted. And then his eyes widened and his cheeks paled at what he saw on the bridge.

"Yeah, I know!" Buzzy Peters snapped grimly. "You picked up a roofing nail! I was lucky and missed 'em, but these two poor guys picked up plenty! Those bank raiders have been throwing roofing nails out on the pavement, Saunders! The damned smart killers!"

THE rookie gaped and looked sick. Buzzy Peters raced over to his machine.

"Drag your bike out of the way!" he ordered the rookie. "Climb up behind me. We can't do these guys any good and I've got to catch those killers!"

The rookie propped his bike against the wreck of the patrol cruiser and came to perch on the emergency packet, strapped on the carrier behind the saddle on the sergeant's machine.

"There'll be more nails on the road!" he gulped in Buzzy Peters' ear. Memories of some sickening moments of his own when he'd picked up a nail had shaken the rookie.

"Yeah, but I got an idea!" the ser-

geant growled. "Hang on, Saunders!"

He started the motorbike, picked his way across the bridge avoiding the nails he could see. Clearing the bridge, he headed out on the shoulder of the highway. The shoulder was hard packed clay, not the smoothest going in the world but safer than the nail strewn pavement.

Buzzy Peters didn't think the raiders would strew nails on the shoulders. But anyhow, he had to take the chance. He opened up and bent grimly over the bars. Toby Saunders clung like mad, his arms wrapped about Peters' stocky body. The bumps at times were terrific.

Luckily, there were no bridges. The shoulder ran unbroken, beside the concrete strip.

Five body-racking miles reeled off, and then they topped a rise. In the level below, a settlement straggled along on either side of the highway.

Even before Buzzy Peters was forced to turn onto the pavement, when the shoulder played out where the highway ran between curbs entering the village, he saw the barricaded road beyond.

A huge towing truck, with a trailer of box car proportions had been jockeyed broadside on the highway, filling the space between two stores facing the roadway. A small group of men milled about the barricade, but there was no sign of the Packard touring car.

Slackening pace for the stop, they picked up a roofing nail.

Air left a rear tire with a dismal hissing. The motorbike slewed and lurched, and spilled the pair neatly just as the truck was reached. Men ran to meet them, one of them bearing a shotgun.

Buzzy Peters, untangling himself from Toby Saunders' thrashing legs, arose and caught sight of the graveled road running off at right angles from the highway, fifty yards ahead of the barricade. He got a sickening hunch. The man with the shotgun confirmed the hunch excitedly.

"They made the turn, when they saw the truck blocking the high-

way!" he shouted. "You ain't three minutes behind 'em, copper! The Bluff City chief phoned my filling station and we blocked the road, like he said to do!"

Other citizens, including the khaki-clad driver of the truck, surrounded the stranded pair of officers. Swearing bitterly, Buzzy Peters examined a ruined rear tire on the motorbike.

"You fellers can take my car and get after 'em!" a stout merchant offered eagerly.

"Thanks, but we wouldn't get very far in anybody's car!" the sergeant gritted. "Those fellows are throwing out roofing nails every little bit. What we need is a racing tractor!"

The man with the shotgun had some information to divulge.

"Listen!" he began breathlessly. "Those bandits are in a jam, sure enough! The bridge over Deer River where that gravel road crosses it, washed out in the freshest last spring and they're going to run into a blind pocket, about five miles from here!"

Buzzy Peters seized on that bit of information eagerly.

"Say! If we could get something that would stand those roofing nails, we might catch up with them before they can get far!"

THE truck driver had plucked one of the flat-headed tire destroyers from the motorcycle tire.

"This what they're using?" he demanded eagerly. Buzzy Peters nodded.

"They wrecked a police squad car and killed two patrolmen," he said bitterly. "Back on Coon Creek Bridge. Those nails are deadly!"

"Listen, they won't bother the tires on my truck no more than mosquitoes biting!" the truck driver declared. "Give me a hand to uncouple the trailer, some of you! We'll catch those killers!"

Buzzy Peters' eyes flashed to the tires on the towing truck. Huge, thick affairs they were, standing as high as his chest, on the wheels of the close-coupled chassis. Eagerly he sprang to help with the work of uncoupling the huge trailer, limping

noticeably because his right leg had been bruised in the spill.

THE big towing truck developed astonishing speed when the first quarter mile of the graveled road had been covered. Buzzy Peters guessed they were hitting sixty at least. He stood on a running board, clinging to the cab on one side and Toby Saunders clung on the other.

The man with the shotgun, whose name was Durward, rode in the cab with the driver. He had been the only volunteer to make the trip.

By shouting, Buzzy Peters could converse with the filling station proprietor.

"Any chance of the bandits turning off on some other road, when they find the bridge out?" he yelled.

"Nothing to turn into but lanes to farm houses!" Durward shouted back. "They can't get to the highway again, without doubling back on this road!"

Buzzy Peters gripped the butt of his pistol grimly. He reflected that the bandits would find it a little hard to double back and pass this truck.

The big truck ate up the winding road. Presently, topping a slight rise, they came in sight of the one remaining span of the bridge that had washed out, and at the same moment spied the touring car.

The rear wheels of the Packard were in a shallow ditch. The driver, attempting to turn about on the narrow road, had struck trouble.

As the truck roared along the level stretch to the bridge site, three men leaped from the road and went sliding down an embankment by the bridge buttress.

"They're taking to the bottoms." Durward yelled. "Too yellow to fight, damn 'em!"

"They'll fight, if we corner them!" Buzzy Peters shouted grimly. He had noted that one of the bandits lugged a tommy gun, and that put odds with the bandits.

The driver braked the truck to a grinding stop when the stalled touring car was reached. Buzzy Peters and the rookie raced to the spot where the bandits had gone down the

embankment. Durward ran after them, his shotgun at ready, but the truck driver stayed in his cab.

Deer River at this point ran between steep limestone bluffs, rising almost perpendicularly from a narrow wooded bottom to a height of seventy feet. The fill from the bridge abutment had formed a steep, sloping descent to the bottoms, but beyond on either side the bluff walls rose sheerly.

On the left, at the foot of the abutment, was a swampy marsh. On the right, the side the bandits had chosen, the ground was dry, and a thick growth of trees had given instant and abundant cover. They were not in sight and undoubtedly had taken that route.

"You stick here, Durward!" Buzzy Peters ordered. "No use in your taking risks with that tommy gun. Saunders and me will go after them."

"Wait a minute!" The filling station man grabbed the sergeant's arm. "I know that bottom like my own back yard! I've hunted squirrels down there a lot. There ain't a chance for those fellows to climb out for five miles, except just one spot!"

"Yeah? How far is that spot?" Buzzy Peters brightened up. "Can we get to it from the topside here before they can?"

"The spot is the old ferry landing, about a mile below here!" Durward explained hurriedly. "The ferry's running again, since the bridge went out. Let me think how you can beat them there!"

The two troopers fidgeted impatiently during his thinking process.

"I got it! Take the truck and run back to that first lane. Turn left there and it'll take you within ten rods of the old ferry road. You'll have a woods patch to walk through and you'll come out on the ferry road, about a quarter of a mile from the landing. I think you can beat them there!"

"Saunders, tell the driver to get the truck turned around!" Buzzy Peters snapped. "We'll try it, that way!"

The rookie raced to give the truck driver orders. Buzzy Peters walked out a little way on the one standing span of the ruined bridge. It commanded a view of the bottom and one armed man posted there could keep a dozen from coming up the embankment.

"You stick here with your shotgun, Durward!" he called. "You got good cover and you can shoot through these ports in the concrete if you have to. If they come back this way, you can hold them!"

The filling station man hustled out on the bridge.

"I'm loaded with buckshot!" he chuckled. "If they try rushing me, I'll make sieves out of 'em!"

The truck driver was backing up, seeking a better spot to turn around than the driver of the touring car had chosen. Buzzy Peters, limping badly, stopped to look over the stalled Packard.

He saw an abandoned extra ammunition drum for the tommy gun on the rear seat, and on the floor a stout paper bag. He stood on the running board and pawed into that sack. There were still a few handfuls of roofing nails left in it.

A few moments later Toby Saunders yelled for him to come on. The truck had made the turn and was waiting for him. The sergeant hastened to climb aboard.

WHERE the lane ended at a woods line, after the truck had bumped and ploughed its rutty length for three quarters of a mile, the driver braked and Buzzy Peters and the rookie spilled from the cab.

"I guess I'll stick here," the driver announced. "Me, I got a wife and a kid!"

"You scoot back to the highway," Buzzy Peters ordered. "There'll be more coppers coming out. Tell them how to find the ferry road from the highway and send them down there!"

The truck was turning about when the two troopers crashed into dense, scrubby timber, cutting an angular line for the road Durward had said they would find.

Panting and briar-scratched, they presently emerged from the woods, on the ferry road. The road was narrow and surfaced with hard packed clay, as smooth as asphalt after a prolonged dry spell.

Just above where they had hit the road, a wooden bridge spanned a deep ravine. There were no guard rails on the bridge. Buzzy Peters gave the bridge a brief glance before he turned and followed the rookie, who had started running in the opposite direction, toward the river.

Toby Saunders got in the lead at once, because Peters' leg was pain-ing him enough to slow him up considerably, and there was something else he was doing as he plodded after the big rookie that delayed him a little, too.

It was a good quarter of a mile from where they'd come out of the woods to the spot where the road dipped into a cut in the limestone bluff and descended to the river.

Toby Saunders was thirty yards in the lead by that time. He came in sight of the ferry landing first, stopped abruptly and shouted. Buzzy Peters put on a burst of labored speed when he saw the rookie level his gun and fire, three times.

The answering *rat-tat-tat* of a tommy gun dinned on the sergeant's ears. He saw the rookie spin about, go to his knees and then stretch prone on the road. The bark of automatic pistols mingled with the blasting of the tommy gun, and dust kicked up in little spurts about the downed trooper.

"Saunders!" Buzzy Peters yelled. "Roll into the ditch—if you can!"

The rookie heard him. He could roll and he did, floundering into the ditch beside the road. Buzzy Peters took the ditch himself and at a crouching run, gained Saunders' side.

The rookie's face was white with pain. His teeth were set and he clutched a spouting left shoulder with his right hand. Blood streamed from a groove in his scalp, too.

Buzzy Peters swore loudly. The route through the bottom must have been shorter than Durward had reck-

oned. The bandits had gotten here first.

"They're down there, Sarge!" the rookie gasped. "There's a car coming off the ferry and I think they're going to grab it! They'll be coming up the bluff in a minute!"

A few yards from where the rookie lay a water course branched away from the ditch. Some one had dumped brush and logs there to stop excessive washing. It would make better cover for the wounded trooper than this shallow ditch, when the bandits came this way.

"Get up, Saunders!" Buzzy Peters ordered, seizing the rookie's good arm. "You get behind that stuff there and lay low! Maybe you can use your gun if they get past me, but don't take chances!"

He aided the wounded man to scramble to the log barrier.

"Where you going?" he demanded.

Buzzy Peters, at a crouching run, was scooting along the ditch, toward the ferry landing. He didn't bother to make reply.

When he came in sight of the river and the ferry landing, the sergeant saw that the rookie had been right in his guess. The operator of the ferry and the driver of the car that had just been unloaded, were standing on the ferry flatboat with arms held high.

Two of the bandits were in the front seat of a Ford sedan and the third one—the man with the tommy gun—was in the rear, leaning out with the gun ready for business. The car was just starting up the steep ascent, the motor roaring.

Buzzy Peters stood erect then, climbed out of the ditch and from the edge of the road grimly tried for the driver.

His first shot shattered the windshield of the Ford about center, the second slug plowing a furrow in the sedan's top. At the speed the car was approaching and at the angle, good aiming wasn't possible.

Then both the man with the tommy gun and the one beside the driver opened up, and lead zipped about the stocky trooper.

A slug ripped into his right forearm and the reflexing jerk of shocked muscles flipped the heavy service revolver from numbed fingers. He stooped, grabbing for the dropped gun with his left hand, and by that time the sedan was almost upon him.

The bandit with the tommy could not get the muzzle depressed enough to do any more damage but the chap beside the driver could handle his automatic all right.

JUST when the trooper's fingers closed on the gun butt another slug tore through the ridged muscles of one shoulder.

Buzzy caught his balance in the ditch, and the gun in his left hand kicked his palm four times in rapid succession. The bandit with the tommy sloughed to the floor and the weapon he had been firing came tumbling to the ground. But the sedan swept on, gathering speed now that it was over the crown of the climb.

Buzzy Peters scrambled to the road, leveled his gun and heard a firing pin clicking on spent shells. From the barrier, Toby Saunders' revolver roared as the sedan passed him. The car kept on.

Stumbling along at an awkward run, Buzzy Peters cleared the cylinder of his gun and rammed in fresh cartridges as he ran.

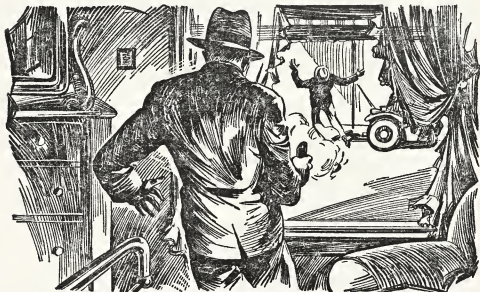
The rookie came lurching to join him on the road. The sedan had almost reached the bridge over the ravine. There floated back to their ears the sound of a sharp explosion that somehow didn't sound like a gun shot.

The scudding sedan lurched, the back end skidded on the smooth clay surface and the car went skittering onto the wooden bridge. For one sickening moment it hung poised on the unguarded bridge edge and then nosed down into the ravine.

One wild yell floated to the ears of the frozen troopers, staring from the road. Then a rending, crashing sound that echoed sharply through the woods—and silence.

When Buzzy Peters and the rookie
(Concluded on page 74)

*The Crime was Planned Down to the Last Detail—
a Hitch Seemed Impossible—but Fate Grinned*



The gunman's trigger finger whitened. Two quick explosions shattered the quiet

NEAT JOB

By HOWARD ADAMS

Author of "Loose End," "Smart Payoff," etc.

THE black coupe slid to the curb as quietly as a shadow. Its thin-faced driver raked the street and traffic with furtive eyes, slanted the front wheels sharply outward, and rasped back the emergency brake. "Okay, Morell—nobody's tailing us," he said, tonelessly.

His companion rose lightly, flipped the door open, and Morell turned abruptly up an alley littered with papers, broken glass, and coal dust. He treaded the broken concrete with the firmness of one on a definite mission—a natty figure in black felt, dark suit, blue shirt, and light tie.

Below a scaffolding of rear porches, Morell scanned a grey base-

ment door, dirty with smears and scribblings, entered, and let his eyes become adjusted to the half-light of the boiler room.

Picking his way between the furnace and a disarray of pails, ladders, hose, and broken furniture, he passed through an opening in a stone partition and toed up wooden stairs ending in a solid door. Laying an ear to the panel, he listened, then located the knob, made sure the key was on the inside, and slowly emerged.

There was neither desk nor clerk in the small tiled foyer. The building had once been pretentious, but its apartments were now divided into smaller units renting to semi-

transients. Mid-afternoon silence hung heavily over the place.

In the dim hallway at the right, Morell stopped at the second door, identified by an ivory oval as number twelve. Slipping on black silk gloves, he worked a key, pushed in, and slid the spring bolt softly back.

The room smelled stale. It was unoccupied and dark, the shades drawn to the sills.

Windows faced a quiet side street. Morell partly opened one at the right, propping up the shade. He brought up a chair, dusted it, and settled back with a letting out of breath. Sporting no holster, he drew an automatic from his belt, handling it with business-like ease and familiarity.

The opened window covered the approach to the adjacent hotel, an ornate structure with a canopy.

The gangster idly tapped a cigarette from a pack, thought better of it, and settled down to sphinx-like watching.

HE was to lam through the cellar, locking the foyer door behind. The car could be reached in sixty seconds. The job was simple, the lay neatly planned. It was a pipe.

Suddenly he tensed, pushed the chair to the wall, and crouched, gun nose poised menacingly. Next door, a long sedan was unloading. A short, florid-face man with wide shoulders and thick neck got out and moved heavily toward the entrance.

The gunman's trigger finger whitened. Two quick explosions shattered the quiet. The big man staggered as though hit with a fist. Red trickled from temple and jaw. He swayed, then crumpled, one arm doubling under, head slapping the walk.

Before the echoes died the murderer, with smooth precision, had shut the window, thrust the gun in his belt, opened the door, and hurled forward.

At that instant, an angular-faced man stepped from the adjoining room, wide-eyed. They tangled and crashed. With a smothered oath, Morell rolled clear and brought up

his fist viciously. The other's head jarred back and he stretched out.

The opposite hall was by this time alive with voices and footsteps. Too late for a clean getaway. With magician-like speed, the gangster jabbed the automatic into a limp hand, spilled the door key, and snapped his gloves down the hall.

He straightened as tenants chattered around, joined the excited chorus of bewilderment, and gradually edged away.

A barrel-chested man in grey pounded down from upstairs, glanced at the prostrate form, and disappeared into room eleven. He reappeared as the gunman gained the fringe of the group.

"No one leaves," he barked, authoritatively. "A man was shot from one of these front rooms. Everyone is under suspicion. Who was here first?"

A voice said: "The fellow in the dark hat, Mr. Neely."

Neely glanced over the heads, called sharply: "In a hurry?"

Morell paused, faintly annoyed. "Looking for the manager."

"It can wait," Neely covered the gun with a handkerchief, lifted it, smelled the barrel, examined the clip, and put both in his coat pocket. He picked up the key, then frowned at the prone figure and gestured: "Help Morse into his room and stay with him."

He approached Morell, an edge to his voice. "Now. Slip me the story, straight."

The gangster bridled. "How come you rate it?"

"Don't get lathered. I'm from the Homicide Bureau. I live here." He grimaced sourly. "This is my day off."

"All I know is that I was looking for the landlady, about rates. There was a noise. When I turned, this guy is running at me, hop-eyed, with a gun. So I cracked him."

"Where'd he come from?"

"Didn't see."

"What's your name?"

"Morell."

"Stick around." The detective

reached out, ran quick hands over the other.

The gunman grinned. "Funny guy."

Neely thumped toward number eleven. "Nothing there." He tried twelve. It was locked. He fitted the discarded key and the door swung open.

A slight grey-haired woman pushed through and exclaimed: "But I rented that room only yesterday to a nice young lady."

THE dick spoke gently. "Sorry about this, Mrs. Duby. The examination will be completed as soon as possible." He faced the group: "No one in, except Morell," and waited until the gunman had entered first.

"An honor," jeered Morell. He scraped his feet irritably, slumped to a chair, tipped back his hat, and stuck a cigarette between slightly thick lips.

The headquarters man spun up a shade, picked an empty cartridge shell from the floor, and compared it with those in the clip he had. He grunted, replaced it where found, methodically nosed about. Stooping, he rubbed a finger on the floor, and held it up for inspection.

Morell snapped a lighter. "Lousy service. Be sure and put the maid on the pan." He snickered through a puff of smoke.

Neely scratched his chin with a thumb nail and studied the other with a peculiar slow smile.

"What's the matter, don't it add up?"

The detective chuckled. "Too good."

"What?"

"The shoes."

The gunman lifted eyebrows. "Maybe I should go barefoot! Look, I'll be seein' ya. I'm clear and I gotta date."

"Sure you have," agreed Neely soothingly. "At the clink."

Morell stared. "Baby talk, huh?"

"Morse didn't do it—he wasn't in this room."

"That breaks me up. Maybe it

was his grandmother. So what?"

"Crackers!"

"Same to you."

"The old gent has been eating crackers," explained the detective. patiently. "There's crumbs in his room and he's walked in them. They're on his shoes and in the hall, but not here."

Morell crossed his knees, seemed amused. "And where are you now?"

"The tip-off is bug powder."

"Come again. I'm nuts."

Neely bent over, rubbed a quick finger across the upturned sole of the gunman's oxford, and held it up. It was green.

"Water bugs have been infesting the place. This morning I helped the landlady heavily sprinkle exterminating powder around the basement. Some of that powder is on the floor here where the blasting was done." Neely paused, added casually: "You didn't happen to get lost and come in some other way besides the front entrance, did you?"

Morell's lower lip stuck out. "That's a laugh. Just grass stains." His voice was derisive, but his eyes wary.

"The chemical lab will tell." Neely drew handcuffs from a hip-pocket. "Stick 'em out."

The gangster hesitated, shrugged. "Okay," he said, coolly.

Half rising, he threw himself against the detective's knees. The cuffs flew clattering to a corner. The two bowled over, locked. Neely kicked free, whirled like a cat, and cracked a fast right. Morell, on one knee, was slow with his guard. The blow slashed his cheek, snapping his head sidewise, and leaving a crimson mark.

Mouth in an ugly twist, he caught the extended wrist and jabbed savagely with his right as he bounced up. Neely slackened his knees and dodged. The balled knuckles skinned his forehead. He dove in, gripped with powerful arms, heaved up and over.

Morell turned in mid-air and then smacked the floor with his back, spurting dust. He staggered up,

gasping, a crazy glitter in his eyes, and charged with both arms flailing. Neely blocked and connected with a right hook that jarred his shoulder. The hood shot against the wall, the back of his head crunching solidly against the plaster. Closing in, Neely whipped a wicked left to the ear.

Morell slid loosely down the wall and hit the floor with a thud. He sprawled grotesquely, breathing hard, dazed eyes holding a surprised expression.

Neely scooped up the handcuffs, clicked them over the limp wrists. Reaching down, he jerked off his prisoner's shoes, regarding the bottoms with satisfaction.

A red-faced, beefy policeman shouldered in. Another stationed himself at the door.

"Hello, Neely."

"Lo, Quinn."

"This one's right in your front yard. Caplow was drilled twice, in the head. Neat job."

"Yeah," drawled the dick. "Saw the show from my window."

The harness bull stared at the shoes. "Souvenirs?"

"Sort of. Evidence. The slugs were thrown from here. There's the shells. The gat and room key were planted on the fellow next door, but this hood pulled the trick. Says his moniker is Morell. It's a new one to me."

"Probably imported. His prints'll tell. Nice work."

The gangster pushed erect, wobbled uncertainly, and snorted: "Just a wild line. It smells. I'm not gonna be the fall guy for somebody else's fireworks."

Neely winked at his brother officer. "He means George Morse."

Quinn said, sarcastically: "Ever try hitting a melon at forty feet with your eyes shut—and plug it twice?"

"Tripe," the prisoner spat.

Stumbling drew attention. The angular-faced man from the adjoining room shuffled toward them.

Morell glared with hot eyes. Then doubt, fear, and sudden terror gripped him, drained the color from his face. He blurted: "God—not—?"

Neely nodded. "Yes. That's what put the finger on you from the first. George has been blind for years."

TEN POUNDS OF NAILS

(Concluded from page 70)

had made their painful way down to the twisted pile of car wreckage at the bottom of the ravine, they found a dead gunner in the rear of the wreck, and two maimed and unconscious bandits crumpled in the front seat.

One of Buzzy Peters' slugs had gotten the gunner in the cheek and torn out through the back of his head.

Grimly the sergeant fished a canvas bag from the wreckage and peeped at the bills and silver crammed inside of it.

"What a break we got!" Toby Saunders stared soberly at the silent bandits. "They are having a blowout right when they did, I mean!"

"Blow out, hell!" Buzzy Peters

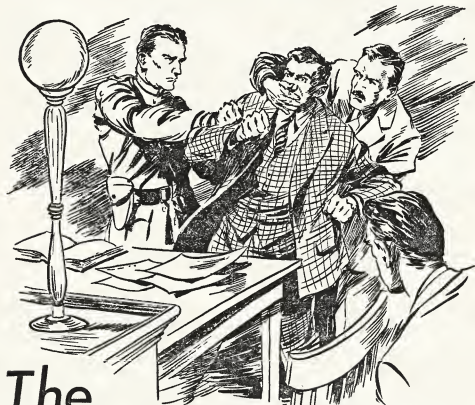
growled grimly. "I filled my pockets full of roofing nails out of a sack I found in that Packard. When we were running to the ferry I put a dose of their own poison out, just in case they did manage to get by us in a car somehow. It caught us some rats, too!"

Toby Saunders stared, his young face expressing mutely the admiration and awe he felt for this seasoned and resourceful trooper with whom he was working.

Buzzy Peters cocked an ear. Faintly there came to them the distant wailing of a siren. Cops from the city, or more State Police, were ripping down the ferry road from the highway.

"Come on!" the sergeant ordered curtly. "Let's get up the bank and head them off, before they pick up some of those damned roofing nails!"

*Tense, Dramatic Moments in a Courtroom—When
a Fiend of Murder Faces Grim Accusation!*



The bailiff clamped a heavy hand over Marco's mouth

The PEOPLE REST

By EMILE C. TEPPERMAN

Author of "Blind Man's Bluff," "Marked for Salvage," etc.

"**N**OW, Mr. Witness, will you just tell the Court and the jury what you saw on the corner of West Street and South Broadway at six P. M. on the evening of the 25th of July? Tell them in your own words."

"Well, Mr. District Attorney, the way I told you, I was standing just outside the pool room, and I seen

this sedan come around the corner. Louie Link was just comin' out of his house across the street, and he seen the sedan and started to duck back in his doorway, but a man stuck his head out of the back window of the sedan, and let loose with a typewriter—I mean a tommy gun.

"He sprayed the whole street for about fifty feet on both sides of

Louie Link's house, and Louie Link was just about cut in half. There was two kids comin' out of the grocery store next door, with a bottle of milk, and they got it too. Both of them was killed."

"What happened after that, Mr. Witness?"

"The driver of the sedan stepped on it, and they swung around the corner."

"Did you see the face of the man who fired the sub-machine gun?"

"Yes, sir, I seen it."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"I think so."

"Have you seen that man since the 25th of July?"

"Yes, sir. He's right here in the courtroom."

"Point him out."

"That's him, sir—Nick Marco, the defendant in this case. He's sitting right there at the counsel table."

The earnest young assistant district attorney heaved a sigh. This was the last witness for the People, and though the man's testimony had been positive enough, his reputation was none too good.

"Your witness, Mr. Benson," he said to the suavely smiling counsel for the defense.

Jerome Benson leaned back in his chair next to his client, lids half lowered over his eyes. He knew that a hundred people in the spectators' benches behind him were watching his back breathlessly.

Lazily, negligently, he waved his hand.

"No questions!"

The judge frowned, puzzled. A buzz of comment rippled through the courtroom from the spectators. Benson always glittered in cross-examination; but in this case he had not questioned a single one of the People's witnesses.

NICK MARCO, the defendant, scowled, said hoarsely out of the corner of his mouth: "Hey, Mr. Benson! What sort of gag is this? You taking me for a ride? I ain't paying you fifty grand to sit here—"

Benson said, very low: "Shut up. I'm handling this case!"

The young district attorney was plainly worried. One of his investigators made his way quietly through the courtroom, whispered in his ear. The district attorney listened for several minutes, then nodded, addressed the judge.

"The People rest," he said.

Benson arose languidly, while judge, jury and spectators waited eagerly to see how he would open the case for the defense. There could be no doubt that he had some sort of trick up his sleeve.

The lawyer winked at his client. "It's in the bag, Nick," he whispered. Then he stepped around the counsel table, approached the bench.

"Your Honor," he said smoothly, with that characteristic air of having his tongue in his cheek, "in view of the fact that it is close to noon, I will ask that court be adjourned for lunch at this time. I find it necessary to interview a witness whom I have not yet met. As your honor knows, I was only called into this case today, and I should like to acquaint myself with this witness' testimony."

The judge nodded. "The court stands adjourned until two o'clock."

Benson said: "Thank you," and walked back to the defense table.

Nick Marco looked up at him anxiously. "Look, Mr. Benson. You—you sure this is in the bag?"

Benson patted his shoulder. "Psychology, my boy—did you ever hear the word? The jury doesn't think much of the state's witnesses; one of them admits he hangs out in a pool room all day, the other is a cokey, and they know it. I could break both of them down in no time, but by not cross-examining them I've convinced the jury I don't attach any importance to them. Now, when I bring in this witness after lunch, they'll forget all about the state's evidence. If the D. A. tries to break him down, the jury will think it's not sporting of him—I left his witnesses alone, and he should do the same for mine. Get it?"

He grinned at the blank expression in Nick Marco's face. "Too deep for you, eh?"

"I guess you know what you're doing, Mr. Benson." Marco glanced around furtively at the bailiff, who sat on his other side. "But what's this witness gonna say?"

Benson stooped, brought his lips close to Marco's. "Did you know you were a hundred miles from this town on the day of the shooting?"

Slowly a smile spread over the defendant's face. "I get it." His lips were twitching nervously. "Believe me, I had the willies when that D. A. put his witnesses on." He added fiercely: "You got to get me outta this, Benson!" He passed a moist hand across his mouth. "I'll never let them burn me. God! I get cold all over when I think about walking to the chair with my head shaved and my pants ripped up the legs!"

Benson shrugged. "You'll be forgetting all about it inside of an hour. But not the other half of my fee—don't forget that. It costs like hell to shoot up kids—even by mistake."

He grinned, and sauntered out, fingering the flower in his buttonhole.

THE young district attorney had been watching him closely. As soon as the courtroom had emptied of spectators, he hurried up to the bench. "Your Honor!" he blurted.

The judge set down the glass of water he had been sipping, scowled at him. The jurymen stopped in the act of filing out, attracted by the note of appeal in his voice.

Nick Marco said to the bailiff who was preparing to conduct him back to the detention pen: "Wait a minute, will you? Let's hear what the squirt's got to say."

"What is it, Mr. Anders?" the judge demanded of the young prosecutor.

"If your honor please," Anders said, speaking quickly, breathlessly: "I have just received definite information that the witness Mr. Benson is going to meet for lunch will testify that the defendant, Marco, was

in a town a hundred miles from here at the time the crime was committed!"

The judge flushed, glanced at the jurymen, frowned at the prosecutor. "Mister Anders! I am surprised. The defense could claim a mistrial—"

"Wait, your honor," Anders hurried on desperately. "This witness is going to commit perjury. Marco shot those children down callously. But that witness' perjured testimony will be unimpeachable. I am informed that he is a man of substance and standing. Benson is going to prime him on just what to say. I—"

He was interrupted by the outraged expostulations of Benson's two assistants, who had been sitting at the counsel table with Marco. One of them was Tyler, Marco's attorney of record, who had engaged Benson as trial counsel; the other was a clerk from Benson's office, who had prepared the notes that Benson used. The clerk was worried, didn't know exactly what to do; his textbooks had never coached him for such an unprecedented situation. But the older attorney exclaimed:

"Judge, I never heard of such a thing—"

From behind him came Marco's frenzied shout: "Hey! What's this—frame-up? Get Benson back here!"

Anders kept on talking, ignoring the interruption. "Your honor, my investigator tells me that Benson has reserved a private dining room in the Grand Hotel, across the street, where he will interview this witness."

The judge was interested, despite his annoyance. He raised his hand to silence the attorney of record. "Let Mr. Anders finish, Mr. Tyler. I presume he is sane. The case is a mistrial already, so we might as well listen."

Tyler shrugged, smiled sourly at Anders, threw a knowing look at the jury.

Anders went on: "My investigator has installed a dictograph in that dining room in the Grand Hotel. I want you to let the jury listen in on the conversation between Benson

and his witness. The People's case will stand or fall by what we hear!"

Marco, who had been leaning over the counsel table to hear better, started to shriek frenziedly. "You can't do that to me, damn you. You can't. You want to burn me, don't you? I'll never let you burn me!" He turned toward the door and screamed: "Mr. Benson! Mr. Benson! They're fram'in' us!"

The bailiff and one of the court attendants forced Marco back into his chair.

The judge waited until he had quieted down, then said to the young prosecutor:

"Surely you must realize that you have ruined your case, Mr. Anders. If I should permit such an unheard-of procedure it would without doubt be viewed as a reversible error by the higher court—"

THE foreman of the jury, who had been listening intently, whispered with his colleagues, then raised his voice:

"If I may suggest it, your honor, the jury would like to listen to that conversation between Benson and his witness."

Tyler, the attorney of record, said: "Your honor, in behalf of my colleague, Mr. Benson, I object to this procedure. It is so self-evidently contrary to the code of criminal practice that I need not even state my grounds—"

He halted as a knock sounded at the door of the courtroom.

Marco shouted: "That's Mr. Benson. Let him in." His voice rose to an hysterical pitch. "They're fram'in' to burn me, Benson! They—"

The bailiff clamped a heavy hand over Marco's mouth, and Marco bit him, struggled up from his chair. He drove an elbow to the stomach of the court attendant on his other side, got free for a moment, and leaped toward the window, his face twisted into a mask of fear.

Before he had taken two steps the bailiff was upon him, assisted by several of the court attendants, and the investigator from the district attor-

ney's office. It took almost five minutes to subdue him, and at the judge's order he was dragged out of the courtroom through the grilled doorway at the side, which led to the detention pen.

During the mêlée the door of the courtroom had opened, and an elderly man entered, sidled over to Tyler, and handed him a slip of paper, then made his way out. Tyler read it quickly, frowned, and read it over again.

Then he put it in his pocket, watched dispassionately while Marco was forcibly led out, still shrieking.

The judge pounded with his gavel for order. He was at the end of his patience. "Damn it, Anders," he exploded, "I'm going to have you barred from this court. You—"

Tyler stepped up close to the bench. "If it please the court," he broke in, "I have a suggestion to make. The defense will waive any objection to this procedure. We will agree to be bound by what the jury hears over Mr. Anders' dictograph—" he glanced covertly at the jury to see the effect of his words—"provided Mr. Anders will agree to be likewise bound!"

The judge said, puzzled: "You mean—"

"That I have sufficient confidence in my colleague to feel that he is not suborning perjury. As an officer of this court, I feel that the jury should know everything that bears on the case; therefore I am willing to have them listen in. But if the conversation between Mr. Benson and the witness proves to be bona fide, I want the district attorney to *nolle prosequere* the case."

Anders nodded quickly. "Agree."

The judge hesitated, then shrugged. "As long as the defense consents, I see no further objection. Very well, gentlemen of the jury; you shall listen."

Anders said: "The dictograph is connected in my office, judge. No one will warn Benson—we have a man posted outside the dining room door." He led the way out.

Across the street, in a private room in the Grand Hotel, Benson was talking to a thin, silver-haired man, over a liqueur that had completed a highly satisfactory lunch.

"Now, Mr. Hedges," the lawyer said, "we can get down to business. I am not going to ask you any leading questions. I am convinced that my client is innocent of that shooting, and I want to hear what you know about it."

"Why," the other man replied slowly, "I know nothing of the actual crime. But I am as certain as I am of my name, that Nick Marco was not in this city on the 25th of July, at six o'clock in the evening."

Benson said: "Go on, Mr. Hedges." He sipped his liqueur appreciatively, waited for the other to proceed.

"As you are aware," Hedges continued, "I am the president of the Midland State Bank of Midland City. July 25th fell on a Thursday this year, and we always keep our banking offices open until eight o'clock on Mondays and Thursdays for the convenience of depositors. Well, I recall distinctly that it was at about five-thirty when this man, Marco, came in to see me. He wanted to open an account with us, making a substantial initial deposit."

"And did he open the account, Mr. Hedges?"

"He did not," the banker stated emphatically. "It so happened that I was familiar with the gentleman's reputation. Our bank is an old one, and our family has run it conservatively for three generations. We do not care to do business with racketeers!"

"I see," said Benson. "Did you tell that to Marco?"

"I certainly did, without mincing words. He could not believe that we would actually refuse to accept a cash deposit, and I finally made it plain to him what my feelings were in the matter. I was alone in the bank, my teller having gone home for supper, and I was rather nervous, glad to see him go at last. He left at about five minutes to six, and though I entertain a deep scorn for

persons of his calibre, I must say that he could not have committed this particular crime for which he is being tried today. You see, Midland City is a hundred miles from here."

"Quite so," said Benson in a pleased voice. "And, Mr. Hedges, are you positive—remember, I say *positive*—that it was Nick Marco himself who was there?"

"Absolutely so. I would not have gone to the trouble of phoning you from Midland City this morning had I not been positive. I never forget a face, Mr. Benson; it is a quality that a banker must cultivate."

"WHAT prompted you to phone me, Mr. Hedges?"

"I disliked very much to see a miscarriage of justice. Whatever other crimes this Marco person may have committed, he is quite innocent of this one. I would feel almost as if I had murdered him with my own hands if I let him go to the electric chair without interfering. How is it that he didn't try to get in touch with me?"

"Marco has been telling me about some bank he stopped in at that day. But for the life of him he couldn't remember the name of the town. He said he had been driving aimlessly for a few hours, had seen the bank open late, and it had struck him as a good place to leave some money in case he needed to draw it out in a hurry some evening. My men have been conducting inquiries among the banks in the nearby towns, but we have confined ourselves to a radius of fifty miles from the city. We had no idea he had driven so far. And besides, I just came in on the case."

He sighed. "I almost thought I was licked. I'm sure the district attorney thinks I'm putting one over on him, and it's probably the only time I haven't. Suppose we get over to the court now."

They finished their liqueurs, and left.

Outside, Mr. Hedges took Benson's arm. "Listen, Benson," he de-

manded. "Are you sure I won't get in trouble on this thing?"

Benson shook his head. "Not a chance. You won't even have to testify. The D. A. will have to *nolle prosequere* the case. It's a good thing I have connections in the D. A.'s office that tipped me off about the dictograph. You put up a good spiel."

Hedges asked anxiously: "And—about the other thing?"

"Don't worry," said Benson. "I promised you that I'd square up the shortage at the bank, and I will. I know the examiners. You just sit tight when they come, and they won't notice a thing."

"I'll owe you a lot for that," Hedges said fervently.

"You don't owe me anything. You've paid off in advance with that spiel of yours. I'm getting plenty from Marco."

BACK in the courtroom, the jury filed into the box, slightly bewildered. The judge scowled from the bench, and Tyler winked at Benson, who had entered with his banker witness in tow.

Young Anders, the prosecutor, was glum-looking and shame-faced. He hurried over to Benson, drew him to one side. "I'm going to *nolle prosequere* this case," he confided.

Benson raised his eyebrows. "Really?"

"And—Benson. I want to apologize to you. I judged you wrongly. I did a terrible thing—"

Benson lifted his hand. "Tut, tut. We've all done terrible things. Don't let it make you feel too bad." He glanced toward the door of the detention pen. "Here comes Marco. He'll be glad to hear you're dropping the case."

Marco entered, his right hand was handcuffed to the bailiff's left. His head was lowered, and he walked with a shuffling, reluctant step.

Benson left the prosecutor, went over to his client. "Marco," he said, "something has happened—"

Suddenly Nick Marco raised his head, and Benson recoiled at the mad light in the man's eyes. Words came tumbling out of him.

"I know damn well something's happened!" his voice rasped. "They was too smart for you. They heard you fram'in' that witness—"

Benson exclaimed urgently: "Shut up, you fool—" but Nick's hysterical accusation drowned him out.

"So it was in the bag, huh? An' now I burn! Well, I don't, see! They'll never get me in the chair!"

His right hand flashed to the bailiff's holster, snatched out the heavy service revolver. Before the stunned courtroom could grasp what was happening the revolver roared, belched once, and Benson tottered, an amazed expression on his face. Once more Marco fired, but this time he had turned the muzzle against his own temple. He fell in a heap over the body of his attorney, dragging the horrified bailiff after him by the handcuffs.

And while pandemonium took charge of the courtroom, Mr. Tyler, the attorney of record in the case, quietly tore up the note that had been handed to him by the elderly messenger. Tyler preferred that its contents be not known. The note read:

Agree to whatever the district attorney proposes. I have the situation well in hand. But don't tell Marco; that moron won't know how to act.

Benson.

In Next Month's Issue: THE MURDER FAN, an Action Novelette by A. LESLIE—SINISTER NIGHT, a G-Man Novelette by FREDERICK C. PAINTON—and THIRTEEN Other Thrill-Packed Stories!

Jungle Justice Threatened at the Sign of the

Leopard's Paw

By EDMOND HAMILTON

Author of "The Ramrod Key Killings," "Carter Makes a Squeal," etc.,



DETECTIVE DAN HEALY looked down grimly at the body of Martin Vale. It wasn't a pretty sight. The explorer's throat had been torn out as though by great claws, and he lay on the floor of his living room with his contorted, horrible face staring up at the electric lights.

Healy's eyes moved from the mangled body to the thing on the desk. It was a clay statuette, about two feet long, of a crouching leopard. Crudely modelled though it was, there was something spine-chilling in the faithfulness of its representation of a great cat getting ready to spring.

The detective turned to the square-set, somber-faced man who stood foremost in the small group of white-faced, staring people.

"What makes you think that leopard statuette had anything to do with the murder, Mr. Ross?" he demanded.

"Vale was murdered because of that statue," Wallace Ross said heavily. "I know it. I'll be next, if the killers don't get it back."

"What do you mean? Where did the statue come from?"

"Vale and I just brought it back from Africa," Ross said slowly. "It's a native-worked clay statuette we found in a secret shrine which we stumbled upon in the Kandundu country of eastern Angola. Our own native carriers were crazy with fear when we took it. They told us it

was the supreme fetish of the Leopard Society."

"The Leopard Society?" repeated Dan Healy sharply.

Wallace Ross nodded. "It's a famous native secret society in Africa, running through all tribes. Utterly dreaded by the blacks there, and by many whites. Its members dress in leopard skins and kill those who offend them by ripping their throats open, leopard fashion."

"And you think some of its members followed you and Vale to America to regain their fetish?" Healy wanted to know.

"I do," the explorer said flatly. "We all, up in our rooms, heard a horrible leopard screech and a gurgling scream down here tonight. We ran down and found Vale—just as you see him."

"If these fetish-worshippers killed him, why didn't they take their statuette with them when they left?" Healy demanded.

"It was locked up in Vale's safe," Ross explained. "I brought it out, before you arrived, to make sure they hadn't got it."

Healy nodded, and his eyes went to the others of the horrified group. One of them, a middle-aged, stout man whose eyes were popping ludicrously, was Frank Vale, the dead man's brother.

The daughter of the murdered explorer, Nadia Vale, a pretty slender girl with ash-blond hair, was sobbing convulsively in the protecting arms of her stalwart young fiancé, Ned Thalman.

Healy shot a question at Frank Vale. "You said you were here on

a week-end visit—why did you choose the week-end right after your brother's return?"

Vale stammered, "Why, to tell the truth, besides wanting to welcome Martin home, I had a financial reason for coming. Martin telephoned me yesterday that now he could lend me a sum I need badly."

"Were you the last one to see him tonight?" Healy demanded.

"I guess I was," young Ned Thalman said hesitantly. "I talked with him here about twenty minutes before he was murdered."

"What about?" the detective shot at him.

THALMAN flushed. "About Nadia. Since his return, Martin seemed to have the idea I wasn't rich enough to aspire to her hand."

"Did you quarrel with him about it?"

"No, I didn't," Thalman denied. "I told him that we loved each other and were going to marry, and just left him."

"There's no need of all this routine investigation, Healy," Wallace Ross broke in. "The murderer of Vale isn't here—he and his fellows are somewhere out in the night, waiting. Waiting for a chance to come back and take this damnable fetish!"

The explorer's big hand was trembling a little as he gestured toward the windows against which the darkness crowded. A tenseness of common fear held the little group. To their strained nerves the lonely country house seemed beleaguered by things of blackness, by things that waited and watched.

Frank Vale's staring eyes protruded further, looking at the windows.

"I—I thought I just heard something!" he whispered. "Like a cat screeching, away off."

"I didn't hear anything," Healy told him sharply. He walked over to the crude clay statuette, lifted the heavy thing in his hands. His eyes ran over its taut outlines.

He turned to Ross. "If you think possession of this thing means death,

what are you going to do with it now your partner's dead?"

"I'm going to take it back," muttered Wallace Ross. "Back to Africa on my next trip, and return it to the shrine we stole it from. If—if I live long enough to do that."

Healy set the thing down, but one end slipped from his hand. The clay paw of the statuette broke sharply off.

Wallace Ross sprang forward. "For God's sake, don't damage the thing! That would mean death for all of us, perhaps!"

Healy nodded, picked up the broken-off clay paw. Then he turned.

"I want you people to go to your rooms and stay there until the Headquarters squad gets here. If there's danger, you'll be safer there."

"But you'll be in deadly danger, alone here with that fetish!" cried Ross.

"I'll take that chance," clipped Healy. "There's something I want to investigate."

They left the room, Nadia Vale's tear-stained face pressed against her fiancé's shoulder. Wallace Ross walking heavily.

Healy stopped Frank Vale as he followed the others.

"Vale, you're familiar with this house? I want you to get me some things — a scale, a big washpan of water and a tub, and a graduated measuring vessel!"

Vale stared. "I guess I can find them in the kitchen."

He went out of the living room by a back door. Dan Healy remained, holding the broken clay paw thoughtfully in his hand.

Suddenly a terrific squalling scream broke upon the night somewhere in the darkness behind the house! An eerie, blood-curdling screech, like that of an enraged feline sounding its hunting call.

Healy sprang to a window, drawing his gun. He thought he descried a crouching black shape slipping through the solid darkness out there, along a hedge. But it was gone in a moment.

Frank Vale came back into the liv-

ing room in a few seconds with the required utensils. His face was twisted with naked terror.

"You heard it?" he gasped to the detective. "It was right outside the house—they're closing in on us!"

"Put those things down and go to your room," Healy clipped. "You'll be all right there."

Vale deposited the things on the floor and fled upstairs.

Dan Healy quickly set up the scale on the desk. He measured the broken-off clay paw and noted its weight. Then he set the washpan of water inside the empty tub, and made sure the pan was filled to the very brim. He dropped the clay paw into the pan of water. A little water at once overflowed into the tub, and Healy carefully measured this with the graduated measure.

He noted down the amount, and then repeated the whole process with the statuette itself, marking its weight and also the amount of water which it caused to overflow. He was swiftly penciling computations, when the lights in the living room suddenly went out!

UTTER darkness clapped down. The detective drew his pistol as a screeching cat scream tore the silence to bits! A big body sprang at him in the dark. He felt a hot breath in his face, steely claws tearing at his throat.

He threw himself back and the claws scraped his skin, ripped right through his collar. He felt them dig into his throat for a new hold as he rolled frantically over. He came up with his gun raised for a blow, and with all his force hit at his attacker in the dark.

The body against his went limp. Healy staggered up, fumbled for the light-switch by the door. By the time he got the living room lights on again, Thalman and Nadia and Frank Vale burst downstairs.

"They were here?" cried Vale, white with terror.

"He was here—and still is," Healy said grimly.

Their eyes widened as they saw. On the floor lay the unconscious form of Wallace Ross. Fastened on one hand was a heavy leather glove-arrangement from which protruded cruel steel claws.

"Then Ross killed Martin! But why?" cried Frank Vale.

I THINK I can show you why quite quickly," said Healy.

He lifted the leopard statuette, and dashed it down with all his force on the floor. It broke to fragments, and amid the pieces lay a dozen clay-crusted things like big pieces of rock glass.

"They're uncut diamonds," Healy said calmly. "Vale and Ross smuggled them out of Africa and into this country inside that clay statuette they made for the purpose. Ross wanted all the diamonds, so he killed Vale tonight and used that fake fetish-worship story to direct suspicion elsewhere. As Vale's partner, this statuette would fall to him."

He turned to Thalman. "When I heard from you that since his return Martin Vale acted as though he'd come back with a fortune—which Frank Vale's story strengthened—I suspected diamond smuggling was at the base of it. And I saw that that clay statuette would be ideal for smuggling."

"So I broke off a paw, on purpose. I checked its weight and also its volume, by the water-overflow method. Then I weighed the whole statuette—and it weighed more than it should have if it was clay all the way through. That meant something *had* been smuggled inside the clay."

"Ross guessed I suspected the truth, and tried to lure me out to my death with his fake leopard-scream. When I didn't go, desperate, he came in here after me." Healy shrugged. "Well, I don't guess that there'll be any lack of evidence at his trial."

Next Month's Novel: WHITE DEATH, by GEORGE BRUCE

Narcotic Man

*Through Shark-Infested Waters in Defiance of
Blazing Guns, Duffy Kildare Carries on
in Pursuit of Dope Smugglers*

A Complete Novelette

By **FREDERICK C. PAINTON**

Author of "Strange Case of Dr. Mephisto," "Mustangs Can Fly," etc.

CHAPTER I

Florida Night

IN the utter blackness that preceded moonrise, a small ship's dinghy with muffled oars rowed silently from the flat green key called Lauderdale, halfway between Miami and Key West. A thousand yards off-shore the lights of a palatial yacht gleamed warm and friendly, and the man in the stern sheets eyed it enviously, and dreamed of a time he would own such a craft.

The Japanese sailor rowed steadily and presently brought the dinghy alongside the ladder. The passenger mounted swiftly and strode aft

where cushioned chairs and lounges inside mosquito netting made a cool spot to rest. A tall arrogant man in spotless white flannels, clutching a drink in his left hand, stared with hard, flaming eyes at the newcomer.

"Anybody spot you, Speed?" His voice was hard, too, brazen with the note of command.

Speed Carstairs put back the hand he had held out.

"You oughta know better than ask that," he rejoined. Without being invited he sat down, and licked his lips. "I could do with a Tom Collins," he muttered.

Bleak Bonner summoned a Jap servitor and ordered the drink.

"All right," he said, "you got down here without being spotted. Swell! Did you have Mason Barr bumped off?"

"Sure, and Red, too." Speed Carstairs laughed thinly. "Geez, Bleak, Red was a scream. He never knew he was being taken for a ride until I put the heater under his nose."

The Jap came with the drink, and he waited until the man had retired.

Carstairs smiled again, his eyes slitted. "Red gives a yell and says, 'God, you ain't doin' this to me. I ain't never done anything but play straight with Bleak.'"

He sipped his drink. Bleak Bonner, lips flat and cruel, waved an impatient hand. "Get on with it."

"Well, like you said, I told him



Bleak Bonner



*Kildare, with all
his strength,
leaped after
the girl*

he was being bumped because he sold the junk to Mason Barr. And the dumb cluck didn't get it even then. I had to explain to him that you had him down here to go to Cuba and buy morphine and not to sell it. And selling it to a rich kid like Barr, uncut, was just like telling the G-men we were in the dope business."

Carstairs drank again and smacked his lips with relish. "Well, Red says, 'I only made one mistake like that.' And I says, 'one's enough,' and let him have it. I dumped his body out in Van Cortlandt Park and there was never a police kick-back."

STILL Bleak Bonner did not relax. In all his years of smuggling this was the first slip-up and his cunning mind wanted to be sure he was not involved. He had made two million dollars running dope and had yet to see the inside of a jail.

"Did the G-men get to him before you shut him up?" he asked.

"Hell, no! I glommed him the minute he stepped off the train from Miami."

"Good enough." Bleak Bonner permitted himself a mirthless smile. "Now, about Mason Barr—did you follow my orders?"

"Posilutely," grinned Carstairs in open admiration. "And there's another laugh. It's rich, I tell you. Mason Barr died while he was talking to that G-man, Duffy Kildare. The way I put it together is this: when Barr's mother got after him to lay off the drug, she learned that he had bought the stuff here. You knew that; that's why you wanted Barr bumped. Well, the kid sends for the G-man, Kildare, and he comes. The kid is nuts for a shot of junk. Like you told me I gave him the poison deck. So while the G-man is looking on, the kid loads his syringe and pushes the plunger."

Carstairs found that funny and laughed heartily. "And by God, with Kildare watching him, the cyanide of potassium kills him in five minutes. And those stupid clucks are wondering yet how we got to him."

To his surprise the joke didn't strike Bleak Bonner as funny. He jumped to his feet and began to pace the deck.

"There was a slip there," he muttered. "Carstairs, you didn't get at Barr soon enough. He told Kildare he bought that junk right here in Lauderdale."

"Naw? On the level?"

"Do you think I'd rib at a time like this?" snarled Bonner. "Duffy Kildare is in Lauderdale—has been here for a week."

Carstairs put down his drink with a crash. "My God, Kildare here—in Florida? That means he's onto our scheme." He turned pale.

"No, he isn't." Bonner shook his head. "But he suspects we're running morphine from Cuba in here. He doesn't know how. More important, he doesn't know how we get it north to New York." Bonner's arrogant eyes flashed contemptuously. "And he'll never know that. I defy any G-man to uncover that scheme."

"Right," said Carstairs. "But listen, Bleak, we ought to give him the works before he uncovers anything at all."

Bonner returned to his chair and sank back. "I'd thought about that," he went on in a calmer voice, "but it's no dice. Not yet anyway."

"Why?"

"I've been having him watched," said Bonner. "And if he gets too hot why, we'll put the heat on him and pull out. But listen"—he leaned forward tensely—"listen, Speed, I've got a half million bucks worth of morphine ashore tonight. The biggest lot I've ever shipped. If it gets through I stand to clean a million. And if I get that I'm stopping—quitting—going to the Riviera or some place and enjoy my dough."

"A half million," Carstairs repeated in awe. "Geez, you lay it heavy on the line."

"I'm running it out tonight," said Bonner. "So unless Kildare interferes with that shipment I'm letting him alone."

Carstairs drained his drink. He shivered and his face was slightly

pale. "A big risk, Chief. Kildare's smart. He's the best the G's got."

"He isn't as smart as I am," said Bonner contemptuously. "He—"

He broke off sharply and again jumped to his feet. "Martha!" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

A girl, slim, dripping with water that made her thin dress cling softly to the lovely lines of her figure, came across the deck like some mermaid arisen from the sea. She had piles of yellow hair, straight blue eyes and even now she was beautiful enough to make Carstairs breathe appreciation.

Carstairs laughed. "Bleak, you sure supply all the comforts of home. If she's for me—"

"Shut up!" snapped Bonner. He smiled at the girl, trying to keep the hard mercilessness from his face. "Martha, you didn't swim through that water! Why the sharks, the barracuda—"

"I came that way because if any one in Laudermer knew I was on this yacht alone with you they'd kill you tomorrow," she rejoined calmly. She regarded him fearlessly, her rounded breast rising and falling with her swift breathing.

"Well," laughed Bonner, "at least let me get you a robe, and have your clothes dried."

"I'm warm enough, and I don't intend to stay," she told him. "I came to tell you that unless you let my brother alone I'm going to the police with what I know about you."

Mentioning her brother, Martha Harmon's voice faltered. She loved her brother, adored him. They were twins, and between them was a psychic bond that made one's happiness the other's. This trouble that made him fearful, made her fearful. To save her brother Billy from this unknown rich man who had threatened him, she had swum the perilous water.

The smile was wiped off Carstairs' face. And even the supremely arrogant Bleak Bonner grew grim.

"You know nothing about me, Martha," he said.

"I know you're a crook," she said,

"I know that you've got Billy involved in a most horrible business—innocently involved. And when he found out the truth and wanted to quit, you threatened to murder him. He told me that today. He had just found out what a frightful beast you are. Selling drugs to people to kill them." She shuddered. "You're worse than a beast—you're not fit to live!"

Carstairs and Bonner exchanged glances. Carstairs' hand vanished inside his coat where a gun was holstered.

"And so," Bonner said softly—too softly, "you risked your life to swim out here and tell me you knew I was a narcotic smuggler and to leave your brother alone."

HER lips tightened. "Yes, I did just that. And to get your promise to let him go away tomorrow and not to harm him. If you do that I shan't say anything to the police."

"Considerate of you," said Bonner. "Very well, I promise to leave him alone after tomorrow. Does that suit you?"

Her tense lovely face did not relax. "Yes, that's all. I'll go now."

She turned silently toward the taffrail over which she had clambered. Bonner's eyes found Carstairs' snake orbs and he nodded. Swift as a cat Carstairs leaped for the girl. He clapped one hand over her mouth, held her helpless with the other. Bonner disappeared for a second and returned with a rope and gag. He bound her thoroughly himself.

"I'm afraid, my dear Martha," he sneered, "that despite the conventions, you'll have to stay on this boat until tomorrow—perhaps many tomorrows after that."

The two men took the limp girl down to the main owner's cabin and locked her in. They returned to the deck with black looks.

Carstairs snarled: "You're in a jam, Bonner! This brother of hers—what does he do?"

"He's the front for running the junk," glumly said Bonner. "I in-

tended to bump him before I left. Nothing rough. A chain tied to him and thrown overboard beyond Moccasin Reef. I'm not fretting about him. It's her."

Carstairs grinned evilly. "You could take her to Cuba. They like white girls there."

Bonner smiled. "So they do. But I"—he stared pensively at Carstairs—"I sort of like her myself." He stirred uneasily. "Met her when I took on her brother for a front. I played on the level, Speed. She's got what those other women haven't. Well," he sighed, "I'll have to think about how she can be arranged. She—"

A sharp yell rang out from amidships. A shot roared and a shrill scream followed.

Bleak Bonner leaped up, his face blanched yellow. Carstairs hit the deck with a snub-nosed automatic in his hand.

"What's that?" he snarled.

Bonner shook his hand. A pearl-handled automatic was gripped in his right hand.

"Something's screwy, Carstairs, but by God, I'm telling you I'll shoot my way to selling that half-million load of junk north! They'll not stop me! Come on!"

Stealthily they moved, yet hurriedly, toward the spot from whence the scream had come.

CHAPTER II

Midnight Attack



DUFFY KILDARE came down through the late afternoon sun to the Lauderdale station of the Florida East Coast Railroad. On a siding were a dozen cattle cars and the air was furious with the sounds of *baaing*, as frightened sheep

were forced from a corral into the cars. Three Negroes were urging them on with whips.

They glared suspiciously at Kil-

dare as he passed them. So, too, did the young man in riding boots who apparently was supervising the loading. Even the stationmaster stared with dislike at Kildare as he asked for his telegram.

It had been that way during the entire week, an active yet passive hatred. It was making Kildare's mission doubly difficult, for he could get no aid from these crackers. They were all fishermen, native conchs, and they were all bootleggers of liquor from Bimini, Nassau, and Cuba when chance offered. They feared and hated any outsider.

"Yeah, they's a telegram," said the stationmaster, "but it don't make no sense to me."

"That's too bad," said Kildare, putting out a freckled, red-haired hand for it. "The next time I'll tell them to use words you know."

The stationmaster did not get the satire. He grunted, deliberately turned his back. Kildare stood for a space, holding the coded message. In three years four million dollars worth of dope had come through this section to be distributed around the United States, making crooks and suicides, murderers and broken hearts. He loathed narcotic runners. He had given all his clever brain to this task, and so far he had but one clue and that not a good one. One little clue and the presence of a palatial yacht named the *Pledicum* that should not be here in the hurricane season.

He sighed silently and mentally decoded the telegram. It was from Richard Carle, bureau chief of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in New York under whom Kildare was working.

RED BISHOP'S BODY FOUND VAN CORTLANDT PARK STOP TWENTY DECKS UNCUT HEROIN FOUND SEWN IN HIS CLOTHES STOP FLORIDA TAN AND TICKET STUB STOP LAUDERMER IS WHERE DOPE IS COMING IN STOP ARE YOU TAKING A VACATION OR WHAT I WANT RESULTS AND QUICK.

CARLE.

Kildare swore and ripped the telegram to pieces.

"Eight other agents tried to crack this case and flopped," he muttered, "and he wants me to walk in and break it in a week."

Nonetheless, he was disturbed. The murder of Red Bishop closed out the hope the G-men had of getting another clue to the head of the narcotic ring. It put the case right up to Kildare.

With no other clue his mind went back to the yacht. Bleak Bonner was aboard it. Rumors were thick about Bonner. His income tax statements showed money made in the stock market. But the stock market records showed money lost. Where, then, was he getting his money?

On a sudden impulse Kildare walked over to the youth in the white linens who was watching the loading of the cars.

"They tell me you've got an outboard motor and a row boat I can rent, Harmon," he said. "I'll pay you ten dollars a day."

The youth, good-looking in a sullen way, scowled. "I don't want to rent it," he said briefly.

Always this surly rebuff from the natives. Young Bill Harmon looked as if he had more sense than the rest, seemed hardly the type to be mixed up in rum running. But he, too, suspected an outsider. Why?

"Your sister has a boat—how about hers?" Kildare asked.

"You quit talking about my sister," cried the youth in sudden passion. "She don't want anything to do with you. I don't want her talking to you any more, or taking walks."

His sudden rage surprised Kildare, but only for a moment. Martha Harmon and this boy were twins. Between them was almost jealous love and sensitiveness. He saw also the sullen unhappiness of the boy. Could he be mixed in this case somewhere?

It was something to speculate about, at any rate. At the moment, his mind made up to slip aboard the yacht and have a talk with Bleak Bonner, he went in search of a small boat. By the time he found one, it was after dark and the moaning wind presaged a storm.

The old conch said: "Twenty dollars a day, suh, and I don't care a damn if you rent her or not. What you-all want with her anyways. 'Tain't no time for fishin'."

"Maybe I want to look at the ocean in the moonlight," Kildare grinned.

"Well, you-all won't look twice, no suh. That wind don't sound like you'll go far."

"That's my business," said Kildare shortly. He took his seat in the stern, wound the cranking rope around the outboard motor top, and yanked it. The motor, for a wonder, caught at once, and with his hand on the tiller, he set off through the darkness toward Moccasin Creek off the mouth of which the yacht lay moored.

When he neared the key in the lee of which the yacht was anchored, he shut off the outboard, took the single oar and with that guided the boat along the tide flow so that presently the yacht's bow loomed over him.

HE floated to her as silently as the water itself. Just as silently, he made the painter fast to the anchor chain and let the boat drift until it bumped gently against the yacht's side. By reaching up he could just grasp the scuppers. He made some noise, drawing himself up, but it apparently went unheard, for when he stood, a moment later, on the deck, he could hear no sound save the soft music of a radio aft.

In the darkness he grinned at the temerity of his plan. Though he realized how desperate it was.

"I haven't got a thing on Bonner," he told himself, peering into the darkness. "He can shoot me dead for invading his privacy this way without a search warrant. But if my hunch is right he won't, and the last words that poor devil Mason Barr spoke may make this guy show his hand."

Those last words of Mason Barr, before he was murdered by pumping cyanide of potassium into his own veins, were Kildare's single clue. That and his knowledge that Bon-

ner was arrogant, egotistical, a man believing fully in himself.

He went forward catlike, until, past the bridge, he found a companionway. Gun in hand, he stole softly toward midships. Abruptly, out of the galley, stepped the Jap valet. The Jap gave a startled yell.

Then, as Kildare raised his gun, the man, instead of putting up his hands, yelled and charged. Deliberately Kildare fired over the valet's head and as the Jap plunged at him he brought his left hand around in a pivoting hook that smashed the fist sharply against the Jap's jaw. The valet went down and never moved.

KILDARE pocketed his pistol and strode toward the owner's deck aft. He ran straight into Bleak Bonner and Carstairs, coming on the run with drawn guns.

"Raise 'em!" snarled Carstairs.

"Sure," Kildare grinned. "How are you, Speed? You, too, Bonner?"

Bleak Bonner's face was pale, and little muscles along his jaw line quivered.

"Duffy Kildare!" he muttered.

"Why not?" murmured Kildare. He held his hands up while Bonner, making sure not to get in the line of fire, took away the G-man's automatic.

It was a minute or so before Bonner regained his composure. Kildare stood there bland, impassive. He was making his bluff; it now remained to see who called.

"You've no right aboard here, you know that," snarled Bonner.

"Just looking for dope," said Kildare, easily. "By the Lord, Bonner, I've got to hand it to you. Whatever your scheme for running, it's foolproof. This was just a last desperate gamble I took—coming here to look over this yacht myself. I might have known that a guy with your brain wouldn't have junk aboard his own boat."

Bonner was rapidly regaining his confidence. He even smiled, but in a deadly way.

"Come on aft," he invited. "I'll buy a drink."

Carstairs stared at his boss, whispered in an aside: "God, Chief, have you gone nuts?"

"Shut up," snarled Bonner, "I'm handling this."

He led the way to the soft divans so luscious in the cool of the evening breeze.

Kildare sank down on one. "You do yourself well, Bonner," he murmured. "I wonder how many murders, suicides and robberies your morphine caused that you can afford to live like this."

"I suppose," said Bonner, easily, "that you are acquainted with the word, 'libel'?"

"Yeah?" Kildare lit a cigarette. He glanced up. "By the way, Bonner, that was a clever way you had to kill Mason Barr. And Carstairs, your chief gun, did a good job on Red. No clues at all."

"Who says anything like that?" snarled Bonner. He sat, watchful, but Kildare, looking into the man's eyes, read an uncertainty. Bonner didn't know how to take this, he couldn't make up his mind what should be his next move. Kildare decided to help him.

"Too bad you didn't kill Barr earlier. He gave the play away."

"That's a lie! He couldn't give away anything that isn't so."

"No?" Kildare leaned suddenly forward, mouth flat, eyes flaming.

"All right," he ripped. "He didn't know anything, eh? Well, what did he mean by crying, as he was dying, 'Wool! Wool!' He should have given that cyanide by mouth, Bonner, not by hypodermic. That was a slight error—he could speak two words."

Bonner bounded from his chair. The gun in Carstairs' hand wobbled.

"He said that?" cried Bonner.

"I'm telling you."

Kildare leaned back nonchalantly. He had pulled his bluff and he hadn't been called. Young Barr, in his dying tremors had cried, "Wool," but the word had meant nothing to Kildare. It didn't mean anything to him now. But it meant something to Bonner! And Kildare was certain these two rats suspected him of

knowing more than he did. His bluff had worked.

Bonner's fingernails drummed on the chair. "Then you were lying when you said you didn't know how I ran the dope—eh? This is a pinch?"

"It's a pinch," nodded Kildare. "Narcotic smuggling. Life for you in Atlanta instead of on this yacht, Bonner. I've got a boat moored forward. We can all three go in that."

He rose to his feet, grinning at Carstairs. "Shooting a G-man is hanging, Speed. Better put up the rod."

Calmly he backed toward the short steps that led to the forward runway, wondering what he would do if they actually did tamely surrender.

He had no proof except their tacit admissions.

Helplessly Carstairs looked at Bonner, his finger quivering on the trigger. But Kildare had guessed right. Bonner broke.

He came bounding out of his chair, seized Kildare's arms and held them tightly.

"Tie him, Speed," he panted. "By God, I know what we can do."

Kildare struggled, but the two men, both powerful and desperate, bore him down. A moment later he was securely bound. They picked him up by head and heels and carried him down to the cabin.

"Tell Mike to get under way at once!" shouted Bonner.

"Why? Why not give it to him now?" cried Speed Carstairs.

"You sap! Do as I say! We'll drop him on one of the uninhabited keys the way the smugglers used to do with the Chinese when the coast guard cutters caught them. He'll die there quickly enough."

Bonner stepped back, smiling very cruelly. "You spoke your piece, Kildare. You know what wool means. Well, tell it to the sea gulls on a lonesome key." He laughed. "There isn't even fresh water on some of those keys and you'll be a few days dying."

CHAPTER III

Kildare Moves



KILDARE was stuffed into a berth in a small cabin. His bonds hurt, and he was bitterly aware of the capstan forward taking up the anchor. He had time now to weigh what he had discovered.

Bonner, of course, was the king dope smuggler of the United States, something the F. B. I. had wanted to know for years. Kildare also knew now exactly how the dope was ingeniously distributed to peddlers up north. But he had to get ashore to prove it. And he knew his chances of ever doing that were slim. Bonner was a killer. But, somehow, he must escape.

Struggling with the ropes that bound him, he became aware of a sobbing breathing from across the darkened cabin.

"Hello," he said, "Who's there?"

He heard a muffled sound. "Gagged," he muttered, "and a female or I'm a liar."

He gave a sudden lurch of his body that tumbled him off the built-in berth. He rolled over and over on the floor finally to come up on his knees alongside the opposite berth.

"Listen, whoever you are," he said. "Your hands, like mine, are bound behind you. Swing around and get your back to me. Twist your hands so your fingers are free. Good. Now—feel my hands? Get working on those knots. As soon as I'm free we'll give these rats a going over."

Something in his voice, cheery in despite of danger, galvanized the girl. Her nimble fingers worked on the knots better than a man's could have done. Kildare could feel them, warm, sure, picking, pulling while he contracted his muscles to give her as much room as possible. It was arduous work. His knees hurt. He ached all over. Every second he

expected Bonner or his chief gun, Carstairs, to come in and ruin the last chance. But they were getting the ship under way, and the two prisoners were left alone. At the end of ten minutes, just as the yacht began to quiver to the thud of the engines, the last knot fell away, Kildare had his fingers free. He unloosed his legs, felt over the soft, still damp form of the girl, took off the gag and her bonds.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Martha Harmon," came the low thrilling voice. "Who are you?"

Duffy Kildare felt a sweep of joy warm him. For five days he had watched and talked to this lovely girl, and had liked her better than any he had known until now.

Now they were sharing a common peril. Every ounce of his courage was brought to the crisis.

He said simply, "I'm Duffy Kildare—you called me a tourist."

"But what are you doing here?" she hesitated, went on with a rush: "You—you—are you a detective?"

"Federal Bureau of Investigation. How did you get here?"

For a moment she did not answer, then suddenly a sob tore her. "I can't tell you! I must not! It would mean—" She stopped short.

But Kildare could guess. Her brother, then, was a part of the drug syndicate, as he had surmised. A minor tool, perhaps, but still guilty of the heinous crime of smuggling narcotics. Kildare was hurt, hurt clear through at that realization. But G-men have to take heartbreaks along with danger of death. He stiffened as he helped her off the berth, and felt around in the darkness for some kind of a weapon. His lips set grimly.

"You mean your brother is mixed in this—smuggling business?" he said.

She clung to him, hands gripping his arms. "He didn't know!" she whispered fiercely. "He thought they—he—Bonner—just wanted to back him in raising sheep. He never knew what they wanted to use him for until lately. Then he tried

to break away and Bonner threatened to kill him. That's why I came here tonight—to beg for Billy's safety."

Kildare continued to grope for the weapon. Martha pulled at him. "If I help you, please don't take Billy! Promise me—promise! Please, for my sake—"

He pushed away her arm. "My job is to catch dope smugglers," he muttered harshly. "Let the courts decide Billy's innocence."

She fell away, a sob in her throat. His hand discovered a walking stick, light, but some sort of a weapon at last. He whispered to her:

"Let's go—we can swim ashore. My boat's cut adrift by now."

She followed him, begging no more, but somehow dangerous in her very silence. They moved along the companionway, and so to the amidships stairway to the deck. They encountered no one; apparently the crew were getting the ship turned about. By the sound of the engines Kildare knew the ship was barely under way. His hopes mounted. Tonight he would break this case and amaze Carle. This yacht could not put to sea so far that a revenue cutter could not overhaul it, take the smugglers.

Kildare had reached the deck, preparatory to slipping over the side. He turned to aid the girl. Suddenly the lights on the deck blazed high; a voice shouted. Some one else yelled.

"Kildare! He's getting away!" howled Carstairs.

HE fired above from the bridge twenty feet away. The sheet of flame lit his face, savage with hatred and fear. But his bullet ricocheted bluely off the taffrail.

Kildare never knew how Carstairs missed. But he did. Swiftly the G-man seized the girl, threw her into the water. Carstairs fired again and a swift burn of pain swept Kildare's legs midway between his hips and knees.

"Get him!" Carstairs yelled.

His gun roared four times in quick

succession, but Kildare wasn't there. With all his strength he had leaped as a broad-jumper leaps, squarely out into the night. He struck the water all of a heap. He went down, straightened out, swam downward, knowing that his life depended on staying under as long as possible.

The salt water burned in the wound across his legs. His lungs began to swell; his ears to roar; he was suffocating. He had to have air. Blindly he fought downward through the soft, warm water. His arms refused to carry him any farther. He had to have air. His body screamed for it. And almost without his volition his head popped out and his agonized lungs exhaled with a hiss as he gulped in air. He was yards away from the yacht, but the outgoing tide was sweeping Kildare toward it. He saw faces at the taffrail. Heard a yell: "There he is!"

A rifle cracked and the slug hit the water, only a few feet away. He went down again. Came up after a lesser period. They were yelling for a boat to be lowered. They were coming after him.

He heard Bonner's shout: "We've got to get him, if we run him to Key West!"

He dove and swam under water a few strokes, emerged, and paddling with one hand got off his shoes, got out of his coat, tore off his shirt, stripping himself to shorts.

While he was doing this a form came out of the darkness. He could follow it plainly by the phosphorescent glow of its movements, and knew, with dismay, that his own progress through the water could be similarly traced.

"Are you all right?" panted Martha's voice.

"Yes," he said. "Let's get going!"

She swam strongly, tirelessly, born to the water apparently, and man though he was, he could scarcely keep up with her strong breast stroke. Behind them the boats put off, and flashlights began to scan the water. Worse, the yacht's searchlight suddenly blazed and with a dazzling finger of radiance began to comb the

water. Eventually every square yard of water near the yacht would be searched.

Kildare swam on, knowing the slimness of their chances, but not thinking of the risk. Here, under the shelter of the keys the pellucid water was flat as a mill pond. Twice he saw the phosphorus stirred by a swift long, torpedo-shaped body. Sharks! Or, what was as bad, barracuda! But the girl kept on, calling back: "Sand sharks. They'll not bother you."

"Let 'em!" Kildare said. "We've got to get ashore."

SHE made no reply. Their long strokes had taken them into the waters out of the range of the searchlight, but it was playing about, dangerously near. The small boats were searching about. He could hear the splash of oars.

Suddenly a small bulk loomed close ahead in the darkness, and Kildare heard a gasped ejaculation from the girl as she spurred ahead. He saw her white arm reach up and grasp the dark bulk, realized with a thrill of exultation what it was. His own small boat that had been cut loose from the yacht and was adrift! The girl had caught its gunwale and as he saw her draw herself up he exulted again, remembering he had shipped his oars.

The next minute he, too, was alongside, his hand reaching out, but Martha held him off with an oar.

"Duffy Kildare?" she said tersely.

"Yes," he muttered, realizing how he was tiring, wondering what the girl was about.

"I'm the only one who can get you to shore. You can't possibly swim the distance, and the wind's coming up strong."

"And so what?" he said, trying to make a grab at the oar that held him off.

"You promise to save my brother from jail, or I'll row away and leave you. Leave you to the barracuda or for that swine, Bonner, to kill."

Kildare kept his arms pushing the water. He said nothing. She dipped

an oar, the small boat moved a little.

"Do you hear me?" Her voice was tense, frantic. "You'll die out here! They'll kill you or you'll drown. You can't get ashore without me. Promise, and I'll get you there and they won't get you. Spare Billy!"

Kildare swam on. His mouth was set; his eyes flashing.

"Answer me," she whispered passionately.

"Go on," he said grimly. "I'm an F. B. I. man. It's my job to crack a case, and not to pass judgment on who's guilty or innocent. Your brother is a party to this junk racket. And if I get ashore I'll pinch him."

"Then die, you fool," she panted.

"Well, a man can't live forever," he answered. "Go on, peddle your papers."

She rowed away in the darkness and left him alone.

CHAPTER IV

Night Battle



HE was tiring fast. Only because the water was warm could he go on. But it was warm water that was dangerous, for the flesh wound on his legs bled steadily. That was why he was so tired. He kept wondering why the small boats,

he hunting around, did not see him. He did not know that fish, feeding at night on the surface, also made bright phosphorus glows, and that he had never really been seen since he left the shipside.

His chief thought was that if he swam with the tide rip against his left cheek he would reach shore. But that he would make it he began to doubt. A rotten shame, too, when he knew the secret of the greatest narcotic smuggling idea of the century.

Nor did he know that in swimming away from the small boats he was

heading for the Gulf of Mexico. The two boats, manned by a desperate, frantic Bonner and a cool killer, Carstairs, were going toward shore, hunting for him in that direction. So as the minutes passed he was heading for a thousand miles of empty ocean.

He swam less now, floating on his back, kicking his feet and waggling his hands. It was terrible how tired a man could get. And the warm water was lethargic.

Suddenly, floating on his back, he rolled over, alertly alarmed. A small splash had come from almost directly beside him. He raised a hand to lash out, stopped as the girl's face, framed with hair like sea weed was limned above the greenish unearthly glow of the water as she leaned over the gunwale of the small boat.

"I couldn't," she sobbed. "I couldn't leave you. Not even for Billy."

Kildare made a sound in his throat. She was a swell girl after all! His heart pitied her, too, while his brain told him he'd pinch her brother even if it meant life for the youngster. A G-man had to think that way. He let her help him as he clambered exhausted into the boat. Soundlessly dipping her oars, she set off in the opposite direction to which he had been swimming. But he thought he knew she had not been far away at any time, there in the darkness.

"Stout girl," he muttered. He knew then how much he could and did think of this girl. But it would do him no good. She'd never look at a guy who had sent her brother to Atlanta.

He was more tired than he had known. A deadly lassitude made him powerless to help Martha with the oars, know little until he felt the boat bump on the sands.

Kildare's arms were heavy as lead. He could not get from the boat. He heard the girl's voice coaxing him, urging him; then her strong arms hauled him from the boat into the shallow water. She grabbed him, limp as a log, she towed him until at last his outstretched hands groped

along a shell littoral. He lay in the water, too exhausted to move. She crouched beside him.

"There they go," she whispered, "up the wharf. Oh, my God, they might kill Billy!"

The words were like a tocsin. He partly raised himself. He still had duty to do. But he had sense enough to stretch on the coral sand beach until the giddiness of exhaustion had entirely left.

"You saved me, kid," he muttered, "I won't forget it."

"Then you'll save Billy, and not let him go to prison?"

He stood up, tormented by temptation, torn by desire, suffering from the knowledge that he was about to be the all-time, all-American heel.

"Kid, the law has to take its course," he said grimly.

He got to his feet, his marvelous body recuperating swiftly from the strain upon it. He turned to where the lights of Lauderdale gleamed through the black night.

"Where are you going?" she said. "You can't—you're worn out."

"Listen," he told her harshly, "I baited a trap tonight. Forced Bonner's hand. Now I'm going to get him and his gang."

"But you haven't even got a gun!" "I'll get one. And I know where they're going—and why."

He knew where they were going—to the Lauderdale House where he had a room, where they would wait to see if he had escaped the shark-infested waters. Where they'd shoot on sight. But he was going there, too. That's the kind of a man he was.

He went up the beach, paying no attention to the girl. Presently he came to the palm-lined street, and, hugging the darker shadows of the palmettos and the hibiscus, made his way to the kitchen entrance to the hotel. He went to the third floor to his room and sank heavily onto the bed, aware for the first time that he was nearly naked. Blood still dribbled from the creases across his legs.

"God, I'm tired," he muttered. He

found a bottle of Bacardi and took two huge drinks. Then he got on linen trousers and a coat, found his small Browning gun and two clips. He went back out the door and again encountered no trouble.

THIS puzzled him. He had been expecting to be ambushed. Why hadn't he been? He walked through the small town, and slowly along the side road that led up to the Harmon farm. And suddenly he knew why Bonner and Carstairs had passed up the immediate chance of killing him.

"By God, they're destroying the evidence!" he muttered.

He realized that instantly. Without the evidence to present in court, Bonner, with his money and his record of no arrests could beat the charge. There would only be Kildare's charge—and accusation, unsupported. He knew where they were—at the railroad station. He turned back and broke into a run.

It was long after midnight and Lauderdale slept. He encountered no one in that dash. Once or twice he wondered where Martha was—then dismissed her in the immediate peril to his case.

He slowed down when he reached the railroad track, considerably above the station. Even here he could hear the *baaing* of the sheep that filled the freight cars, waiting for the morning accommodation to take them to Miami and points north. He saw a brief flashlight glow that instantly vanished, but it located the two crooks. With all his skill he stalked the light.

But all his skill went in vain, for he suddenly came around the edge of the loading platform and his outstretched hand struck yielding flesh. He jerked back, as his gun flashed up, but was not swift enough. A flashlight spat a sword of radiance.

The light struck him. A voice yelled: "Kildare!"

Partly blinded, he threw himself prone. That saved his life. The bullet that spat simultaneously went over his head while the spitting

snake of flame burned his hair. He fired upward into it—three times—with deadly intent to kill.

The flashlight dropped. And into its still shining arc Speed Carstairs collapsed.

Speed was claspng his stomach. "You got me! Damn you, you got me!" he muttered weakly. The death rattle cut off his words.

Kildare shot a glance ahead toward another light. At the far end of the chute Bleak Bonner, dirty, his immaculate flannels ruined and greasy, was slitting throats of sheep. The light advanced before Kildare could. Steve heard a voice—the voice of Bill Harmon.

"So you had my sister aboard your rotten yacht!" the boy raged. "Damn you, Bonner, isn't it enough what you've done to me, without you having to ruin her?"

"You rat!" snarled Bonner. "I didn't harm her. But by God, I'm done with you." In a flash his hand streaked out. His gun spat flame before it seemed leveled. Kildare fired twice, but he knew even as he threw his gun that he had missed. Too high.

YET to his surprise Bleak Bonner grabbed at his stomach, then at his chest. The gun dropped from his fingers, and he fell forward, sprawling in that punctured, all-in-a-heap attitude that spells death. Duffy Kildare raced toward him.

"How'd I get him?" he was muttering. "I'd swore I was high. Maybe this gun has started throwing low."

Then Martha Harmon's voice he heard. "Billy! You've killed him!"

"And I should have!" snarled the boy. "Even if I hang for it. The swine! The mean rat! He didn't deserve to live."

The flashlight moved forward and Kildare saw Martha and the boy, bending over the dead body of Bleak Bonner.

Kildare came quietly alongside. Martha turned, and gave a frightened cry. "It's Kildare. Oh, Billy!"

The boy turned in a flash, gun

coming up. He gazed into the straight muzzle of Kildare's gun.

"Drop it, lad," said Kildare very softly.

He saw then that the boy was wounded in the left arm. Blood gleamed against the white of his shirt. Slowly Bill's fingers relaxed; the gun dropped with a thud. Kildare stooped, picked it up.

"A thirty-two," he nodded. "Not much of a gun."

"Good enough to kill that rat," said Billy.

Kildare bent over Bonner and then turned the crook over. "Hold the flashlight nearer," he ordered. He saw now that his gun had indeed fired high. These were the small punctures of a .32.

"So it is," he admitted.

"Oh, God!" gasped Martha. "You won't charge Billy with murder! He fired in self-defense—I swear it!"

"You don't have to. I know he did," growled Duffy Kildare.

Wearily he gazed around. Speed Carstairs was dead. So was Bonner. The biggest dope syndicate in the world was broken by death. There among those sheep not yet dead was the evidence to prove how the drug was distributed. His job was complete, the case cracked.

He turned to look at the girl, wan yet beautiful in the flashlight's cruel light.

"No," he said, "he won't have to stand trial for murder."

Swiftly now, he bent down and held the muzzle of his gun close so that he could not miss the two blue punctures in Bonner's flesh, and pulled the trigger twice. The heavier .45 slug tore the .32 bullet holes and out the back, the corpse jumping to the impact.

"If they ask you," he said, straightening, "I killed Bleak Bonner. There is the proof of it."

He moved on to where Bonner and Carstairs had feverishly prepared a pile of Florida pine lightwood, commonly called fatwood because it burned like fat. On top of this were stacked the slaughtered bodies of the sheep they had destroyed and had

intended to burn. He examined one or two, but did not find what he sought.

He came back to where Martha and Billy were watching him with the steady stare of hopelessness. "Catch me one of those sheep," Kildare ordered.

SILENTLY, Billy Harmon obeyed. As he brought it back he said: "I didn't know, Kildare. I had a few sheep here—Martha and I had them and Bonner came and said I ought to go into the business in a big way what with all the tourists in Florida and the meat markets and all. He offered to back me. I imported special sheep from Cuba, and some from up north. I—I didn't really guess what was going on until I discovered he was shipping the sheep north, and not to Miami at all. That looked funny, and I began to ask questions, to snoop around a little, and—"

"Yes, I know," said Kildare. He bent over the sheep that Billy had brought while Martha held the flashlight. The sheep was unshorn and seemed fat and well kept. He plunged his fingers into the fleece. "That's what poor Barr meant by wool," he muttered.

For his expert fingers had shown that sheep had been seared in swathes underneath. That is to say, the outside fleece had been left the way it grew while underneath clever pockets had been cut out. In each of these Kildare found a small oblong tin, itself covered with glue to which fleece had been stuck. More glue affixed the tin to the short fleece of the sheep's skin. Kildare tore off a tin, forced it open, and smelled of the white powder inside.

"Pure heroin," he said, "on its way to New York and other points—wherever you shipped sheep, there

to be cut with sugar and sold for twenty dollars a deck." He paused. Then: "Where did you ship to?"

He was not surprised at Billy Harmon's reply. Every big city in the United States was a market, I found out. Bonner's agents in each city bought them, plucked out the tins and sold the sheep for what they could."

"Nearly a foolproof scheme," Kildare muttered. "Only Barr must have been sold—when he was here—a tin of uncut stuff by Red and saw the wool stuck to the tin."

He sighed, and turned to Billy Harmon. "Can I trust you to watch these sheep for the night, and go with them to Miami tomorrow?"

The boy nodded. "I tell you I never knew, even when I guessed something was wrong, not until a sheep was running away and I grabbed for it and pulled loose a tin."

"I believe you," said Kildare. "Watch them, and tomorrow I'll do all I can for you."

He turned, shoulders sagging. "God, I'm tired."

Martha ran to him. "Then Billy won't have to be arrested? You'll save him?"

Kildare gently shook his head. "He's under arrest now, but I'll give evidence to clear him. Is that good enough, kid?"

Slowly she nodded. Her eyes gleamed with a new hope. Billy gave a little cry and they stood with locked hands, hope and happiness brightening them instantly.

"Oh," she said, "you're wonderful, Duffy Kildare."

Kildare straightened his sagging shoulders long enough to grin. "Tell me that next week in the moonlight," he chuckled and dragged himself off to the hotel to call Washington and make his report.

*Next Month: Duffy Kildare in Another Breath-Taking
G-Man Novelette by FREDERICK C. PAINTON
that Packs a Mighty Punch—SINISTER NIGHT!*

The Badger Game Gets Tangled With a Murder Rap—and a Blood-Smeared Crime Feud Rages !



He got halfway up, then fell back to his seat

CHICAGO SHAKE-DOWN

By S. J. BAILEY

Author of "Invisible Snare," "Ghost Fingers," etc.

"**S**HALL I go to work on him now?" The girl gave her companion a knowing look across the red and white checkered table cloth in a booth at Spilky Remson's place in the East Forties.

The man she addressed turned and glanced across at the booth opposite. He shook his head.

"Not yet. Wait 'til he's finished that one. Lemme see, that'll make his fifth, won't it?"

She nodded jerkily, an excited glint in her deeply mascaraed eyes. Her cheeks glowed prettily in an over-rouged way. Crimson ribbons coursed lightly over her clear-

skinned shoulders, widened and came together in a V in the front of a gown that was a slinky red sheath.

"Yeah, Steve, it's his fifth," she said, "but he's been mixin' them somethin' fierce. He looks about ready to shove off. I don't want to wait until he's so pie-eyed he's color blind. After all, what did I henna my hair for, and what did I squeeze into this skin-tight red glad rag for if—"

The man in the booth opposite raised an unsteady glass and gulped greedily. Some of the liquid spilled and flowed down his chin, irrigating the irregular ditch of an ugly scar.

There was stubble on his lean cheeks and his suit had a slept-in appearance.

As the glass settled to the table, guided by two shaking paws, the girl's companion nodded.

"Okay, Jerry, might as well get started. He's about— No, wait!"

There was a commotion down the aisle between the booths. Two men lumbered along, side by side, looking into the booths, poking deliberately behind drawn curtains. Protests perked up here and there, only to subside quickly as annoyed patrons recognized the prowlers. That they were a pair of headquarters dicks was written all over them.

"Watch this," whispered Steve. "This is gonna be hot."

One of the detectives came abreast of their table. He put his big hands on the red checkered cloth and leaned down. He looked at Jerry and then at Steve and then back at Jerry. There was inquiry in his gaze.

The girl shrugged carelessly, smiled sweetly.

"Don't mind Steve," she said. "He's just an old boy friend that went friendly on me."

The detective looked again at Steve, saw a man about thirty who looked as if he'd been drowning deep sorrow in hard spirits. He was a trifle bleary-eyed. His broad and massive shoulders drooped as he draped himself disconsolately over the table.

The detective looked back at the girl.

"Where d'you park your glad rags, toots?"

"The Traymore, big shot," returned the girl. "Come around and see my grandma's spinning wheel sometime, why don'cha?"

The other dick had come up to the booth opposite, where the man with the scar lolled drunkenly. The dick backed up, poked his companion in the ribs, and said:

"Here he is, Bradley. Come on, forget the skirt, and let's go to work."

Brad turned away from the girl

without a word, crowded into the booth opposite. The other dick followed, pulled the curtains tight across the opening.

A waiter passed by and, seeing the two dicks go in to the booth, went hurrying down the aisle, looking for the boss with anxiety plain on his face.

"Whew!" breathed Jerry, a sickly grin trickling over her rouged face. "I nearly got hornets in my hair that time!"

Steve's face had lost its mooning look the minute the dick had turned his back. A lively interest lighted his face now, making it almost handsome. He shook his head gravely. There was contempt in his voice when he spoke.

THESE cops sure can bruise their way in and spoil a nice setup," he said.

Sounds began to come from behind the curtain. First the low-pitched voices of the dicks, then the drunkenly mumbled responses of the man with the scar. Then some muffled thumping sounds and a screech of pain.

The waiter came hurrying down the aisle, followed by a short, stout man who wiped his hands nervously on a large linen handkerchief. It was Spilky Remson, owner of the joint. He peered through a crack in the curtain, backed away swiftly and signaled the orchestra leader beyond the booths.

Remson literally pushed the waiter on his way as the opening notes of a popular jazz number crashed around their ears. At the same moment a scream of agony bit through the curtains, electrified the people in the neighboring booths. Some of them hurriedly gathered their wraps and got out of the place, pushing past the protesting Spilky Remson. Others, more hardened, huddled more closely about their tables and sipped their drinks a little faster.

The scream of pain drew out into a blood chilling howl that no blaring jazz orchestra could hope to cover. Jerry shivered, her hand fluttered to

her throat. She threw a terrified glance at Steve whose brow was knit into a deep frown, his hands clenching the table's edge.

The curtain quivered violently across the aisle, the howling abruptly ended and a new sound came to their ears—a series of hollow thuds, like a human skull being beaten rhythmically against a wooden partition.

"God!" breathed Jerry. "They must be giving him an awful working-over."

"He'll be in better shape for us, when they get through," said Steve, "—unless they put him out altogether."

The girl screwed her pretty face into a mask of horror. "You're pretty hard!" Her voice shook, her words were chilled.

Steve bit the end off a cigar, flicked the tiny cone of tobacco into the aisle. He puffed several times, removed the cigar from his mouth.

"It's in the game, you know that, Jerry."

Suddenly the curtains were flung aside, the two dicks emerged.

"I guess he's clean, all right, Bradley," said one of them.

"Clean as soap," returned Bradley. "Not even a tooth pick on him." He pulled out a nail file and dug it under his finger nails. Then he wiped his hands on the handkerchief. Little flecks of blood, tiny tufts of stubble appeared against the white background of the linen square. Jerry shuddered, turned her face away.

"Come on, Bradley," said the other dick.

"Look's like red-head's squeamish," grinned Bradley. He shoved the handkerchief into his back pocket, swaggered down the aisle.

Steve looked across into the booth opposite. Jerry's eyes followed him, darting fearful little glances at the figure sprawled in the corner.

The man's face was bleeding from a series of deep scratches. Blood oozed from one corner of his mouth and coursed down his chin. He held one hand to the side of his head, laid the other flat on the table and tried dazedly to rise. He got half-

way up, then fell back in his seat, cracking his head smartly against the booth wall.

"Roll him now," said Steve. "He'll go big for the sympathy stuff in his condition."

Jerry threw him a biting glance, got up and crossed the aisle. She wasted no time. Signaling a waiter, she ordered a bowl of warm water and a towel. When the waiter returned, she drew the curtains across the entrance to the booth, and proceeded to bathe the man's face. She gave him a little whiskey and he sputtered, looked up gratefully through puffed, bruised eyes.

"Who're you?" he asked.

"Just a girl that's been around. Want me to take you home now?"

He nodded.

"**Y**EAH, that might be a good idea. You—you saw what happened?"

"Yeah—that is, I *heard* it."

"Those two dicks—they sure threw their weight around. Lookin' for my rod."

"Did they find it?"

"Naw. I'm too smart, see?" He grinned crookedly. Some of the scratches on his face were pretty deep and would not stop bleeding. Jerry kept wiping the blood away.

"What did you say your name was?" he asked.

"I didn't say. But it's Jerry."

"That's nice. Mine's Jud—Jud Hamas. You and me's gonna get acquainted, eh?" He put a hand on her arm.

Jerry dragged him to his feet.

"Come on, Ironsides, you got to get home and get your plates patched. You've sprung too many leaks."

The patrons of Spilky Remson's beer joint were treated to an odd sight when Jud Hamas staggered out, steered and propelled by the girl in the red dress who struggled gamely under his dead weight.

When they got to the curb, she signaled a taxi. The fresh night air only seemed to make him weaker. He sprawled all over her.

In the taxi he couldn't even sit up. He rolled over and landed with his head in her lap. She had left the towel in the restaurant and she had nothing to put under his head to keep the blood that was oozing out of his cuts from seeping into her thin dress.

Once she made a little spontaneous movement as if to shove him off onto the floor of the cab, but something checked her. Maybe it was the size of the roll he had pulled from his pocket in Remson's place to pay the bill.

The cab pulled up in front of the Grant Square Hotel.

With the help of the cabby and a bellhop, Jerry finally got Jud Hamas to his room—916. She paid off the driver, tipped the boy and turned to see Hamas sprawled out over the bed, one leg hanging over.

She looked around. There was a large radio console near the door. A small table and an easy chair stood by the window.

She went into the bathroom and rummaged in the medicine cabinet, returning a moment later with a roll of adhesive.

Jud Hamas was sitting up now on the edge of the bed. He felt his head gingerly, grinned his crooked grin.

“YOU had some hell of a time getting me up here, eh, baby?”

“Yeah,” said Jerry, “you made it as tough for me as possible. You just laid around and flopped over me like you was a bag of spuds.”

His grin widened and some of the dried scratches around his mouth cracked open again.

“You was wise to me. Why didn't you shove me onto the floor of the cab?”

“I seen you get a tough break from those dicks,” said Jerry. “The least I could do was get you home in decent shape. Turn your head—that's it. I gotta patch you up, Ironsides. It's lucky you had this tape on hand.”

She cut small patches of the tape, using cuticle scissors. The curved

blade made it difficult to cut the tape. The patches had little irregular edges.

“Say, you kind of went for me, didn't you?” said Hamas. “It's kind of nice to have a dame patching a guy up. Say, I think you and me're gonna get along swell.”

“Yeah? Well, listen, big fella, I don't think you're so extra hot. It's only I didn't like to see them give you such a working over. But any guy with nerve wouldn'ta taken what you did.”

The grin vanished from Jud's face. It was evident he'd been cut right down where it hurt.

“Oh, so that's what you think. I'm yella, eh? Well, you ain't seen me in action yet, baby. I was smart to take that working over from that dick, Bradley. And wait until things are set right; then watch me give him the heat like I gave it to—”

Hamas broke off abruptly and stared at the back of the girl as she trailed across the room to the radio cabinet. She tuned in on an amateur hour, said: “Rats!” twirled the dial to a jazz program and returned to Jud's side.

She sat down close to him, laid her hand softly on the back of his head. He winced and the tiny patches of adhesive wrinkled and buckled.

“Ouch! My head feels like a watermelon takin' a ride in a concrete mixer— That's better.”

Jerry had dropped her fingers to the back of his neck and let their cool, red-nailed tips drift over his leathery skin.

“Maybe I better put some hot and cold towels on where your head is bumped, Ironsides,” she said.

“No, just sit here,” replied Hamas. “You know, baby, I noticed when you walked over to the radio, you got a swell figure.”

He pulled her hand off his neck, twisted her around and dragged her shoulders down in front. He laid his lips against hers. She went warmly limp in his arms.

There was a slight noise at the door, a noise like a key turning very slowly in a lock. Instantly Jerry

squirmed away from his caresses, cried:

"Let me go! Let me go, you big overgrown rhino!"

Hamas dropped her, leaped to his feet, panting. She slid off his knees, bumped to the floor, scrambled up and darted to one side.

"Steve!" she cried. "Thank heavens you're here! He—he tried to—to—"

The door clicked shut.

"Oh, he did? Well, he's gonna catch some lead poisoning."

The voice was flinty. In Steve's hand was a .38 with silencer attached, and it drew a cool bead on Jud Hamas' heart.

Hamas' hand dived under his coat, came out empty. He sat down suddenly on the bed. The point of his tongue lubricated his caked lips. His head spun and he eyed the radio with what seemed almost a longing glance, as if in some way it might come to his aid.

The lilting strains of a waltz issued from the depths of its brocade-covered speaker—an indifferently played piece, more strained than lilting, more tortured than executed.

Steve's forehead knit into black furrows. His eyes blazed wrathfully.

"You were clean in Spilky Remson's when those dicks fanned you and you're still clean. You haven't had a chance to put back the harness. You won't live to squint at the sun tomorrow. I'm gonna let you have a slug in your chest—right now!"

Hamas wilted visibly under that ugly .38 with its sinister black cylinder. He fought to control himself.

"What's eatin' you, man? This—this jane something to you?"

"Something to me?" blazed Steve. "She's my wife!"

"Hell," said Hamas, "I didn't know. Gosh, man, I didn't—"

"You got her up here. You didn't care who she was. She looked good to you and you—"

"No, don't shoot!" cried Hamas. She practically invited herself here. She comes over to me in Spilky's an'—"

"Shut up, rat!" menaced Steve.

He came a step closer, lowered the barrel of the gun a half inch to adjust his aim.

"You can't get out of this by lying. I was there. I saw you stage that sympathy gag—"

His finger flexed on the trigger. Hamas bawled out:

"No, don't shoot! I'll give you anything—anything, but don't—here, I got a roll, five grand. Take it. I'll get more. I'll give you—"

Steve took the proffered wad of bills, tossed it to Jerry.

"Count it," he directed.

A minute later she said:

"There's forty-six C's here, Steve."

Steve looked at Hamas a minute. A glimmer of hope crept into Hamas' face.

"**M**AYBE we better give him the heat anyway," Steve said.

"No," said Jerry. "Let's get out of here, Steve. He won't bother us."

"All right."

Steve backed away. Jerry got behind him and opened the door. He turned and looked at her. She grinned, slapped the door shut again. Steve dropped the gun on the table, pulled out a cigar, made a great show of lighting it. Jerry walked over, draped herself on the table, one leg dangling idly.

She tossed the roll of bills onto the bed.

"Well," asked Steve, looking directly at Hamas. "How we doing?"

"Yeah," said Jerry. "Just tell us how're we doing. An' don't get sore, Jud, because all the boys said you was a right guy."

Slowly a tremendous grin of relief spread over Jud's patched face. Only a haunting shadow of something unpleasant remained. Perhaps he was remembering how foolish he had looked, begging for his life.

"For a minute you two sure had me fooled," he acknowledged. "Say, you got a swell routine, all right."

"That's what we wanted to show you," said Jerry. "We know you already got plenty shakedown specialists playing the clip joints in this burg. But we needed a protected

connection bad, and we figured this was a good way to strut our stuff."

"Where you from—and why?" asked Hamas pointedly.

He seemed to have recovered himself completely, seemed to breathe good fellowship toward the pair.

"We worked together in Chi," said Jerry. "I did the come-on and Steve did the shucking."

"Yeah," growled Steve. "And everything went along swell until some old geezer with heart trouble put up a squawk. It was in his room at the Standler Hotel. We conked him too hard and he croaked. We lammed it to this burg a coupla weeks ago and we been looking for a good connection."

"Well, I can use you two," beamed Hamas.

A bright smile played over Jerry's pretty face.

"Gee, ain't that swell?" She walked over, put her arms around Hamas, planted a kiss on his forehead.

"That's for not getting sore at us," she cooed.

Steve puffed contentedly at his cigar, a pleased expression glowing on his handsome features.

"YOU say you been in town two weeks?" Hamas demanded.

"Yeah," replied Steve. "But we found out you got to be tied up with somebody to work this town." He broke off, eyed Hamas admiringly. "Say, I got to hand it to you the way you got this burg sewed up."

Hamas nodded knowingly.

"You got to know how to do it," he said. "I got this town by the ears. Why, I could get away with anything in this town."

"Anything?" said Steve. He got up, strolled over to the radio. The jazz program had turned into a prayer meeting. He twirled the dial. "Anything?" He looked over his shoulder significantly.

"Yeah, that's what I said."

Steve walked back to his chair, having succeeded in extracting some fast dance music from the rattling speaker. Jerry said:

"What do you say we have a

couple bottles sent up. An' maybe some sandwiches?"

Neither of the men paid any attention to her. A strange tension seemed to have crept into the room. She got up, took a couple of steps away from the bed.

"Say, what's the matter with you two," she asked. "I said let's—"

Steve broke in on her, his voice conversational, idly curious.

"While we were making the rounds, we heard a lot of talk, Jud. There was a guy named Carlane, so we heard, bumped off last week in a private dining room over Spilky Remson's joint."

"So what?" Hamas' voice grated harshly.

"They said a waiter thought he saw you come out of the room just before Carlane was found. But when the cops faced him with you he wasn't sure—or he was scared—maybe that was it."

Steve eyed Hamas coolly.

"Say, what is this?" demanded Jerry, her hands resting carelessly on her smooth, rounded hips. "Are you trying to get Jud riled, Steve?"

"Never mind him," said Hamas. He turned to Steve. "What else did they say?"

"They said the cops found two slugs in Carlane's body, fired from a Luger. They're looking for the Luger. I guess that's why they fanned you in Spilky's place today."

Hamas laughed harshly.

"They thought I'd be dumb enough to have it on me, eh? Jeez, them cops sure are clowns, some of them."

"Bottle," said Jerry softly. "Not meaning to interrupt you two, but I'm thirsty. I could go big for a bottle. And maybe some sandwiches. Bottle, bottle, who's gonna get the bottle?"

"Yeah," grinned Steve, ignoring Jerry's remark. "They sure can be dumb, can't they?"

Hamas got up, feeling gingerly at his patched face. "We ain't treating Jerry right. Let's order up some drinks like she say—"

He took two swift steps forward, his hand dived for the table which

held the phone. Instead of grabbing the instrument, he grabbed Steve's gun. He drew back, leveled it at Steve.

"Get back!" he warned viciously through cracked lips. "Get back! Make a funny play and I plug you. I don't want to do it here, but I will if I have to." He motioned at Jerry with his free hand. "Get over beside him. You two have heard too much now."

"What's the matter, Jud?" shrilled Jerry. "What did we hear? I didn't hear anything. Did you hear anything, Steve? Steve, damn you, I told you not to get Jud riled!"

"Come on, Jud," said Steve. "You are taking me wrong. I was only—"

"Yeah?" Hamas fingered the gun caressingly. It never wavered a fraction of an inch. "I ain't talked to anybody about Carlanc. You two kind of got under my skin. I said a couple of things I shouldn't. There ain't any way out of that but to give you the heat. And that's what I'm gonna do—as soon as I figure out how to do it without spilling blood around this joint."

"Well, all right, if you're gonna take it that way," said Steve. "Maybe I can help you. How about hacking us up in the bathtub, putting us through a meat grinder and selling us to the local butcher for hamburger?"

"GET wise!" snarled Hamas. His finger played with the trigger.

"Stop it, Steve!" screamed Jerry. "Can't you see he means it? He's sore! He'll give it to you, if you don't—Oh, Steve, don't make him—"

A sudden light flashed across Hamas' face.

"She's screwy about the guy! Jeez, that gives me a idea. I'm gonna hire a room for you two, escort you there and let you both have it with his gun. I'll fix it for a suicide pact. Cripes, it's an idea!"

"Yeah, it's an idea—" began Steve, then stopped abruptly. There was a heavy knock at the door.

Hamas' startled glance shot over Steve's shoulder. For a split second

the muzzle of the .38 was deflected.

Steve dove toward the radio, crashed into Jerry, sent her hurtling into one corner. His massive shoulders crunched against the cabinet, crushing the walnut-veneer grating-work shielding the speaker.

His left fist shot into the opening, snaked rendingly through the brocade, broke through the cone of the speaker and reappeared a moment later, a big Luger held ominously in it. Something that looked like a white ribbon waved from its long, thin barrel.

Slugs from Hamas' gun splintered into the frame work of the cabinet, one of them ripped across the back of Steve's neck. Blood oozed, turned his shirt collar from white to red. Jerry, crouching in the corner of the room, let out a little animal-like cry and leaped toward Hamas' smoking gun.

From outside came excited shots. Something heavy crashed into the door. The windows shook. The door held. The crash came again.

Steve coolly leveled the Luger, just as Jerry's teeth sank viciously into Hamas' wrist. Steve shot over Jerry's head, heard glass tinkle, saw Hamas spin round and collide with the table.

The slug had cut clean through his shoulder, and smashed the upper window sash. The gun fell, bounced on the carpet.

The lock gave way with a grinding, splintering sound. The door waved in drunkenly, came to a scraping stop two feet from the jamb.

A burly figure crowded through, eyed the three in the room. It was Bradley, the dick.

"Well, if it ain't redhead, prettier and wilder than ever." His tones were light, but his eyes prowled warily around the room. They jumped onto Hamas.

"So somebody took a shot at you, Jud. I ain't surprised. I ain't even sorry." He saw Steve. "Who the hell are you and what are you doing with that Luger?" Steve reversed the gun and handed it over.

(Concluded on page 108)

An Order for Murder

*The Pen, Benny Peel
Decides, is Mightier
Than the Gun!*

By
STEVE FISHER

*Author of "He Died Smiling," "The Butcher
from Hell," etc.*

BENNY PEEL shoved his hands in his pocket and stared at his boss, wondering what in the hell was wrong. Benny wore a neat blue suit; he had a face that was as square as a wooden block, and on it were his eyes which were like little grey triangles. His nose was short and his lips thick. Most of the boys thought Benny was screwy; but Benny knew better—he knew he had brains.

The only thing that Benny lacked, in fact, was conscience. That was the only reason the boss retained him on the payroll; Benny failed to see why anyone outside of himself should want to live, therefore he felt no pangs of remorse when he calmly knocked off a citizen or two with a .45 the boss had given him.

"What's the matter now, Joe?" he asked. "Kick-back on my last job?"

The boss shook his glossy head, jerked a fat cigar from his mouth and looked up, frowning.

"Nope," he said, "the job was per-



*There was a hideous spurt of orange
from the car*

fect; too damned perfect. It's caused a terrific shake up in politics; three of our labor unions have busted and the strikers are back to work."

"That's not my fault," Benny said.

Joe puffed on his cigar a moment, then leaned his elbows on the nicked mahogany desk and leaned forward. "Benny, my boy," he purred very smoothly, "you've been popping off around here that you intend to be a fiction writer—that you want to write detective stories, and—"

"That hasn't anything to do with my ability to kill," Benny stated calmly. "Truth is—I've had a lot of experience. I'm a great man. How will anyone know about it if—"

"What have you been writing?"

Benny was startled by the sound of Joe's voice. "Nothing about us—that is, what I've written I've changed around; changed the names and so forth—"

"Have you sold anything?"

Benny beamed. "Nope. I had a terrible time at first. These editor guys kept giving me back my stuff and telling me I ought to go back to grammar school. They wouldn't believe I was a real crook." Benny's squarish face darkened. "But I got sore one day and I jammed my gun into an editor's stomach and told him he was going to publish the story or—"

The boss was smoking rings around the room. His face was coloring. "What'd the punk say?"

"He got very interested in me then," Benny continued. "He asked me to sit down, and he started asking things about me, and what I could do, and he mentioned something about a rewrite staff if I had some real good material for stories."

"Well?"

"I got an order to write a swell big article about New York rackets. It isn't done yet, but—"

"Listen, Benny," the boss said, "you tell me how much you're going to get for that article. I'll give you twice as much and have it published in a better magazine."

Benny looked skeptical.

"But right now," Joe said, opening

the desk drawer and milling through a lot of papers, "I have another little job for you."

"Five hundred on this one too?" Benny asked.

"That's right," Joe told him. "And the guy this time is the dirtiest rat in town."

"He is, eh?" Benny replied. "That's fine. I like to kill rats."

The boss held a political job and he always spoke about the "kills" as though he were doing a great favor to humanity; this did his crooked heart good and gave him a little less feeling of guilt.

"This guy," he went on, "is in a room—or he will be—at 75 E. 98th Street. All you've got to do is open the door at the end of the hall, and you'll see him."

"What time?"

"One o'clock in the morning is best," the boss said. "He won't be expecting anybody then."

Benny wrote the address down.

"The boys will be waiting for you across the street in a car," Joe told him. "Now don't muff the job; do it right, see?"

"I've never muffed a job yet, have I?"

"No," the boss answered, "you haven't." He put the cigar in his mouth, and bringing his wallet from his back pocket, peeled off five one hundred dollar bills. Benny picked them up, smiling.

"Be seeing you," he said.

"So long, Benny."

BENNY left the office, walking down a long marble corridor. When he arrived on the street he looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. His bags were already packed; tomorrow he was shoving off for Europe. The town was getting pretty hot, anyway, and Benny needed a rest. The extra five hundred would come in nice.

He walked down the street, his hands still in his pockets, and his lips puckered. A faint melodic strain whistled through them.

Tomorrow — tomorrow at nine o'clock in the morning when the

boat sailed. He'd be a different guy after tonight and there was no use trying to get around that. There would be no more shooting—not that he minded, but the cops might get wise some time. Anyway—first thing in the morning, what was going to happen would change everything.

He caught a trolley and rode up Broadway to 96th. He hung around the drugstore here for an hour, playing the bagatelle machines. The fact that he was going to kill a man at one o'clock seemed to mean nothing to him at all. He remembered the instructions—opening the door at the end of the hall and seeing his victim. Benny was a polite hood who didn't bother about the names of his corpses, and seldom knew unless he saw the account in print the next morning.

It was halfpast midnight and Benny was sauntering up Broadway toward 98th when he passed the telegraph office. He stopped, looked inside, and then grinned. He hadn't told the boss the exact truth; he had a big surprise for him, but he didn't want him to know it before it happened. But what the devil, it'd only be a few hours now before he knew anyway. And Benny wouldn't be seeing the boss anymore after tonight.

He shrugged his shoulders. Might as well. He entered the telegraph office, sat down and started writing a message.

He noticed that it was ten minutes to one when he handed the written telegram to the clerk and paid for it. Hurriedly then, he left the office and headed for the address Joe had given him.

He entered the shabby-looking apartment building wondering what sort of a punk he was going to kill this time. "The worst rat in town," Joe had said. Well, Benny shrugged. What was the difference?

He arrived at the end of the hall. The door was a very narrow one. Benny drew the gun from his shoulder holster, quickly jerked open the door; he blasted three times at the shadowy figure that wasn't three feet from him. Then he turned and ran back down the hall. Behind him he

heard a crashing of splintering glass.

His feet slapping in hard rhythm, he arrived on the porch of the apartment house, started down the steps. There was suddenly a hideous spurt of orange from a car across the street; it was accompanied by a spluttering *tac-tac-tac-tac-tac* of tommy gun bullets.

Benny crumpled. He was cut almost in two; he fell the rest of the way down the steps, a bleeding wreck.

IT was one-ten, and two of the boys were standing in front of the boss, grinning.

"I knew he wouldn't catch on," Harry Laws said. "Benny was too dumb—he never did have any brains."

"I thought when he saw that mirror that was full length in the little closet, and he remembered that I had told him the guy he was to kill was the worst rat in town, that—"

"It doesn't make much difference," the third man interposed. "He thought he did his duty, and he came dashing out to get our bullets. He's dead now, and I guess there isn't anybody that cares."

At that moment someone knocked at the door. Laws and the other man backed, their hands in their coat pockets clutching guns. The boss got up, rubbing his shiny head. He opened the door a crack; was relieved to see a Western Union boy standing there with a telegram.

He signed for the message and closed the door. Laws and his companion gathered close as Joe tore open the envelope:

YOU ALWAYS THOUGHT I
WAS DUMB STOP BUT I AM
NOT DUMB STOP THE EDITOR
OF THE DETECTIVE MAGA-
ZINE SAYS I AM A GENIUS
STOP I KNOW THAT YOU AND
THE BOYS WILL BE PROUD
OF ME WHEN YOU SEE MY
STORY FOR YOURSELVES
STOP IT WILL BE PUBLISHED
TOMORROW MORNING STOP I
AM LEAVING FOR EUROPE
BECAUSE NOW THAT I AM AN
AUTHOR I FEEL I MUST STOP
WORKING FOR YOU AND DE-

VOTE TIME TO MY WRITING
STOP BUT I LIKE YOU AND
THE BOYS AND I HAVE NOT
LEFT YOU ENTIRELY OUT OF
THE GLORY I DIDN'T TELL
YOU TONIGHT BECAUSE I
WANTED IT TO BE A SUR-
PRISE STOP I USED ALL THE
REAL NAMES IN WRITING
THIS ARTICLE ABOUT THE
TOWN POLITICS STOP IT
WILL BE A GREAT SENSATION
AND I WILL BE A GREAT
AUTHOR STOP IT IS ALL
RIGHT WITH ME IF YOU AND
THE BOYS DENY THAT IT'S
TRUE BECAUSE BY THEN THE
MAGAZINE WON'T BE ABLE
TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT
AND THE PUBLIC WILL AL-
READY KNOW WHAT A GREAT
AUTHOR I AM STOP BENNY

The boss' face was dead-white. His cigar had gone out. Weakly, he moved around to his desk, pulled open the drawer and brought out his

gun. The boys just stared at him. "Benny," the boss quavered in a weak voice, "he never did have any brains—you fellows were right."

Laws backed to the door, jerked it open, and slipped out. The other men were right behind him. They were halfway down the corridor when they heard the crashing roar of the gun resounding from the boss' office walls.

The suicide of the great politician and the other twisted circumstances would have made Benny Peel a great author, even though a dead one, but the fact was that the magazine had come to the conclusion that Benny was a "hop-head" and that they would get in dutch with the city if they published the article. They didn't. It may still be lying in one of the editorial drawers.

CHICAGO SHAKEDOWN

(Concluded from page 104)

"It's Hamas' gun, Bradley, the one he used to kill Carlane. You boys were on his tail and he had to hide it temporarily until he got a chance to take it apart and ditch it for keeps."

Hamas snarled.

"You dirty, doublecrossing—"

"Shut your mouth!"

Bradley shot his left arm sideways, let his heavy fist crash into the side of Hamas' jaw. Hamas sat down suddenly on the bed. Bradley said to Steve:

"It's a good thing we got this Luger before he had a chance to ditch it. Who's the redhead?"

"Mike Carlane's sister," explained Steve. "I'm Steve Hansen, a private dick she hired to help her get the goods on the murderer of her brother."

"You two dirty tramps," bawled Hamas, "coming in here and pulling that fast stuff on me. Shake-down artists from Chicago. I'll—I'll rip the two of you apart soon as I beat this rap—"

"This rap's gonna stick, big boy,"

said Bradley. "The ballistics boys will prove this gun fired those slugs into Carlane, and it's your gun—or you wouldn't have it hid here." He turned to Steve. "Look at the adhesive tape stuck on the barrel and the butt."

"He had it hid in the radio," explained Steve. "That's why you boys couldn't find it when you frisked the place. He used adhesive tape to stick it close up under the speaker, where nobody would think to look for it."

"When I came in here tonight, I noticed the speaker sounded lousy. Just on a hunch, when he wasn't looking, I shoved my hand in under the cabinet and felt the gun."

"So that's how you happened to have a nice big roll of adhesive in the medicine chest," Jerry said to Hamas.

"You damn' doublecrossing skirt," mouthed Hamas. "I'd like to get my hands on you. I'd break your neck—"

Jerry linked her arm in Steve's, smiled sweetly.

"See you on the hot squat, Iron-sides!"



"Lift 'em, bank buster!" a voice growled

Reward in Hell

*Amid Menacing Shadows, a Daredevil Detective
Boldly Crashes into the Secret Rendezvous
of Desperate Bank Robbers!*

By RALPH FRANKLIN

Author of "A Drop of Doom," "Born to Burn," etc.

THIS job held danger. It wasn't the sort of thing to tackle single-handed. The young dick knew that, but it didn't stop him. He'd asked for help—and had his hunch laughed at. So now he was going to bring it off by himself.

"No matter how it turns out," he mused, with a shrug of square-built shoulders, "the sarge is gonna be sorry. He's gonna wish he'd got his own hooks into some of that reward money. Or else he's gonna have one devil of a time breakin' in a new man to replace Detective Jack Keith—killed in action, but not in line of duty."

He ran his coupe off the road, hid it in a screen of trees, clicked off the lights. The car couldn't be spotted now. A pat on his coat told him his police .38 was in place, ready for action. He slipped out, eased the door shut, went stalking up the narrow dirt road.

On top of the hill stood the deserted old mansion, huddled back among tall oaks. By day it gleamed white in the sun. But now, in the blackness that had swooped down out of a lead-colored sky, it was just a shapeless, gloom-shrouded outline.

The dick's lean, youthful figure glided swiftly across the weed-grown lawn. Suddenly, just a step ahead, a blurred object loomed up. Keith knew what it was—a signboard, set on two posts, proclaiming: "This Site to be Occupied by the Lakeview Sanitarium." A grim smile was frozen on his tight mouth as he skirted around it, crept on.

He pulled his coat closer. A wind, exhaled from the lake like a chill, damp breath, was groping in at the edge of his turned-up collar. It stirred the trees, set them to moaning in ghostly chorus.

Like one more shadow amid a troop of others, he drifted up the

cold, stone steps of the abandoned country home. On the porch he paused, lightly poised on the balls of his feet. Straight before him was the huge, oaken door. He sensed this rather than saw it. Instead of approaching, he darted fleetly to one side. An ivy-grown pillar gave him the cover he wanted. Crouched behind it, he could watch the road, could spot the lights of an oncoming car long before it arrived.

One would come. He'd gamble on that. Maybe in a few minutes, maybe not for hours. But when it did, he'd be there, ready—and there'd be action.

Officially off duty, he was playing a lone hand for big stakes. If he lost, it was his funeral. His bullet-riddled body, in this forsaken place, might not be found for days. But if he won, it meant a ten-grand reward. It meant he'd slap "Bank Buster" Mat Durkee right back into the prison he'd broken out of the day before. He might even turn up the hundred thousand in used bills that Durkee's mob had taken three months before from the Frobisher National Bank. If he did, there'd be a juicy reward in that, too.

Time dragged maddeningly. The young detective, in his restricted hiding place, shivered. It was partly the cold, partly his keyed-up nerves. Several times he moved cautiously, to work the growing numbness from hands to feet. He wanted a cigarette, wanted it badly, but didn't dare chance a light.

Suddenly he went tense, strained forward. Over a distant rise he'd spotted the twin yellow eyes of a car. It was coming fast. He waited, taut with suspense. His eyes, unblinking, were fixed on the bobbing, dancing lights. If the car went on—

It did. With a roar it lurched past. Jack Keith drooped. The let-down was terrific. But wait! Mat Durkee was no fool. Of course he'd run by—to case the joint! He could smell out a trap like a fox. He'd turn at the crossroad, drive part way back—then creep up to the place on foot.

A kink in the road swallowed the car from sight. Keith choked back a groan of disappointment. He wouldn't know now whether the car turned or not. All he could do was wait, wait, wait. He wouldn't know Mat Durkee was around till the desperate escaped con came sneaking up on the porch.

AS the minutes went by, Keith's nerves strained to the breaking point. A dozen times small noises tricked him, sent his hand jerking to the butt of his gun. Nothing happened.

Maybe the sarge was right. Maybe the bank loot wasn't cached here. But it had to be! This was where, after the stickup, Mat Durkee had made his last-ditch stand. In two fast cars the bandits—five in all—had tried for their getaway. But the cops had been right on their tails. A couple of them did make a clean break, but those in the second car—Durkee and two others—took refuge in this old empty house and had to be gunned out. Durkee came out of the house on his own feet, his hands reaching high, but the two who'd holed up with him came out on stretchers, ready for the morgue.

The hijacked currency wasn't found—and Durkee wouldn't talk. Detective Jack Keith wanted to take the place apart, stick by stick, but his sergeant pooh-poohed the idea, insisted that the two who'd got away in the first car had carried the loot. That was what everyone, up to the commissioner, believed.

But Jack Keith was stubborn. He knew Mat Durkee, knew how his brain worked. Why shouldn't he? He'd had plenty of run-ins with the "Bank Buster." Under his third rib he even carried a lead souvenir from Durkee's gun. And it just wasn't in the cards that the hard-faced bandit would trust two underlings with the swag.

No! He'd keep hands on it himself. He'd carried it into this house—and come out without it. So it had to be here! And Durkee had to come tonight to get it. Why tonight? Because the daily papers had announced

that tomorrow morning work would start on tearing the old house down and excavating for the new sanitarium that was to go up on the spot.

Jack Keith stiffened suddenly in his hiding place. His breath sucked in sharply. He'd heard something. The wind, the trees? No, not this time! This time it was Durkee—come for his loot! A dark shadow stole softly up the steps, crossed the porch. The dick's service gun slid from its holster into his moist palm.

A key clicked faintly in the massive door. Hinges creaked. The furtive shadow disappeared inside. Jack Keith waited, expecting some of Durkee's hoods to follow their leader. None came. Piercing exultation surged through the dick's blood. If Durkee was alone, if he had just one man to deal with—

Silent in the rubber-soled shoes he wore, Jack Keith slipped from behind the pillar. He paused, listening at the open door.

Inside he saw a flashlight flick on, send its thin beam shifting about. It came to rest on the marble post at the foot of the wide staircase. Durkee placed the light part way up the steps, so that its rays shone squarely on the ball that topped the post. Then, working in its gleam, he seized the ball with brawny arms, heaved. It came away in his grasp and was lowered to the floor. A hand flashed down inside the post, came up clutching packets of greenbacks. The loot from the Frobisher National!

KEITH stared from the door in amazement. He'd thought the post was solid marble!

He glanced narrowly at Durkee's light, lying on the steps. It made the "Bank Buster" a perfect target. But a sweep of the arm could send it crashing to the floor and plunge the place in darkness. So, from his pocket, the dick drew out his own electric torch. With it held far to one side to mislead the mobster about his position, he snapped it on.

"Lift 'em, Bank Buster!" he barked.

His finger was tight on the trigger. It was ready to squeeze if the bandit whirled, went for his gun. But he didn't. He raised his hands, turned slowly. As his heavy, pock-marked face swung into the light, his thick lips were twisted—in a grin!

"Hullo, copper!" came his hoarse chuckle. "Thought you might drop in. How do yuh like your tea—lemon, cream, sugar?"

Jack Keith's eyes never wavered from the hard-faced crook. What sort of bluff was this?

Durkee laughed. "Awright, boys! Take 'im!"

Something crashed down on Jack Keith's wrist. His gun clattered on the floor. From both sides at once his arms were seized, wrenched painfully behind him. He twisted his head, stared into the leering faces of the hoods who held him. They were the two men who'd got away after the stickup.

"Nice work, boys!" Durkee grated. He stepped forward, his lips snarled back from long, pointed teeth. His fist shot out, smashed hard against Jack Keith's mouth. "You poor sap!" he jeered. "Think I didn't know you were here? I would have—even if I hadn't just about climbed my bus on top of yours out there in the woods! Why, the dump even smelled like a cop!"

Blood was spurting from the dick's crushed lips. But his stormy eyes drilled into Durkee's and he snapped.

"You've got me, maybe—but you won't last long!"

"No?" The big fist lashed out again, caught Jack Keith on the chin. "It'll be a damn sight longer than you! You're on your way out, punk!" He stood back, his evil face twisted with hate. "Grab his bracelets, Mike," he told one of the hoods, who still held a punishing lock on the dick's arms. "Hook 'im to—let's see, there oughta be a steam pipe. Yeah, hook 'im to that steam pipe. We'll finish 'im later!"

"Okay, boss," Mike growled.

Jack Keith's face was an inscrutable mask as one of his own steel cuffs clicked tight on his wrist. The

other cuff went around an old-fashioned furnace pipe.

Durkee dangled the key before the helpless dick's eyes. "Ain't this like old times!" came his sardonic sneer. "Remember, copper, when I hooked yuh to the radiator in a hotel room—an' then sent the key to police headquarters?"

Durkee's fist whammed into his eye. "Wanted the ten grand that's on my head, dincha?" he rasped. "Well, sucker—try an' collect it in hell!"

THE two henchmen had been busy stuffing a pair of brief cases with the loot from the marble post.

"All set, boss," grinned the one called Mike. "Soon as you burn the flatfoot, we can beat it."

Durkee guffawed. In his hand he held Keith's police .38.

"Whatcha mean 'we'?" he gritted. "What the hell! Think I'm gonna split with a couple of lice?"

"Boss!" yelled Mike. "Yuh can't pull a doublecross! I'm tellin' yuh!"

His hand streaked under his coat, came out with an ugly short-barreled gun. Durkee didn't move. The gun clicked feebly. The hood looked at it in terror, while Durkee howled.

"No firin' pin, you fool!" he belowered. "I took 'em out—both your gats—before we started!"

The rat-faced third crook, who had not spoken once, was crouched like a cat ready to spring. Coldly Mat Durkee blasted once with Keith's police gun. The ratty fellow fell.

"Don't do it, boss!" shrieked Mike, backing away till the wall stopped him. "You can have my cut!"

His words changed to a gurgle as the second slug from the gun hit him between the eyes.

The killer turned, a mad light glinting in his eyes. He roared with fiendish laughter when he saw Jack Keith's involuntary twitch of horror.

"You killed 'em, copper!" Mat Durkee croaked. "It's your gun, ain't it? I'll take theirs—and leave mine! After I've put some punctures in your belly—"

His eyes popped wide. He tried to bring the gun up. But in that instant

Jack Keith lunged free from the wall, hit him. An open steel cuff slashed down across the killer's face, cut a deep track in the prison-pale flesh. Then a sizzling uppercut, that started at the floor, lifted him off his feet, sent him hurtling back against the wall.

Jack Keith rushed in, grabbed for the gun still clutched in Mat Durkee's fist. The killer's knee pistoned up. The dick was flung away, reeling. The gun wavered, then roared. His head rammed Mat Durkee's broad chest. They slammed to the floor. The gun crashed again, creased the dick's ribs.

Then he had Durkee's wrist pinned down. With his other hand he faked a punch, slid it instead into the killer's coat. It leaped out at once, with the automatic from Mat Durkee's shoulder holster clutched tight.

"Drop the gat!" clipped Jack Keith, as he pressed the automatic into the "Bank Buster's" ribs.

With a snarl Mat Durkee straightened the fingers of his gun-hand, dropped the dick's service gun. Keith kicked it away, leaped to his feet. He had the killer covered.

"How the hell did you get loose?" the battered mobster demanded.

Jack Keith laughed.

"Remember the time," he asked, "when you hooked me to a hotel radiator with my own cuffs? Well, since then I've carried two keys!"

Mat Durkee's eyes were cauldrons of helpless fury. "Why, you rotten—"

"If I'd got loose before you burned those two rats," the dick said, "it might've saved you the chair. But the key was sewed in the lining of my sleeve—took time. Now you'll burn! You got fooled all around, Bank Buster. You thought they were goin' to tear this place down tomorrow. Well, they won't—not for another month! I got the contractors to run that announcement—just so you'd have to come tonight!"

"The state's gonna burn you, not me. That crack you made about the reward—you got it the wrong way around! I'll be spendin' mine here—while you're gettin' yours in hell!"

When the Jewel Thieves Decided to Frame the Village Half-Wit, Their Picture of Circumstances Wasn't Complete!



He stood there and waited, like a big dog who has retrieved a stick

The NITWIT

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

Author of "Night of Battle," "End of the Trail," etc.

NO one of the three men playing poker at the plain pine table could be called an ornament to the human race. Something lay over their faces, not unlike the distortion produced by faulty glass. Each was different from the others and yet all had two

things in common, boredom and a subdued, tense restlessness.

It was a chill mountain afternoon on the threshold of September, cool enough for a fire, and at every snap of the burning wood each man reacted in his own fashion, with a turn of the eyes, a suppressed jerk

of neck muscles, or an uneasy movement of the body.

Pittsburg Joe, an elderly man with an old fashioned handlebar mustache and protruding eyes, looked out of a window, as they all did from time to time. He sprang to his feet with an oath and the cigarette stained fingers which held his cards trembled.

"What the—what's that out there by the woodshed?"

The others were instantly on their feet. Slim Huggins, incredibly tall, thin, and a little stooped in the shoulders, dropped a hand to the side pocket of his rumpled but once expensive coat.

THE third man, Dicky Travers, fat and expressionless save for his eyes, reached to a shoulder holster.

What they saw might have caused astonishment to less apprehensive men. A huge figure in blue jacket and overalls stood playing childishly with a hasp by which the shed door was fastened. Fingers like miniature bludgeons flicked the hasp back and forth and the mighty shoulders under the blue cloth heaved to a delighted chuckle.

A grizzly bear of that stature and shuffling walk would not have been astonishing. A man was a little beyond belief, and yet undoubtedly it was a man. After a moment he opened the shed door and, still with his back toward the house, piled one of his great arms so high with firewood that his face was obscured as he turned and came forward. A long sigh erupted from the men as though from one throat.

"The village halfwit!" snapped Travers. "I've seen him stalling around the post office. They let him ramble, I guess."

The door opened. A big, round, grinning face, like a tan colored moon, peered from behind the high armful of wood. It located the woodbox. For a half minute sticks thudded down as the visitor ranked the wood neatly in the box. Then he turned and stood erect, towering even above Huggins, and grinned.

There was something so silly, so innocuous in that grin that Huggins and Pittsburg Joe responded in spite of themselves. The white teeth were wholesome. The face and clothes of the creature were clean. He stood there with an enormous lack of self consciousness and waited, like a big dog that has retrieved a stick.

"What's your name?" asked Travers, sharply.

"Me Tiny!"

"That's right," said Travers. "He's the one. Lives with his old man. Moved in from some other hick town. I remember because I cased the whole situation when I come up to rent this dump here."

"All right, Tiny," said Pittsburg Joe. "You run along home now. Your old man don't want you to play with big boys!"

"Me do chores!"

"Listen!" spat Huggins. His shoulder twitched and he ground out a cigarette on the stove. "You beat it, or I'll bend a gat over your head!"

But Tiny just grinned, and after a moment it reached all of them that he either did not understand the threat or disbelieved it. Perhaps he did not know how to be afraid. He just stood there, like a monument, and looked contented and stubborn and cheerful.

"What do you want gum shoeing around here, anyway?" demanded Pittsburg Joe. "Who sent you up from the village? It's a good three mile!"

The broad, smooth brow of Tiny wrinkled, as though the brain underneath were struggling with the meaning of the words he had just heard.

"Do chores," he said at length, and then by a mighty effort he managed to express another thought. He half turned and lifted one of his log-like arms and pointed toward a window. "Pretty!"

Pittsburg Joe looked out of the window and saw an unending green, lifted in mighty billows which were the mountains. There was the sudden surprise of keen blue where the

near hills dropped away to reveal distant peaks and slopes. Here and there a splash of red heralded autumn. And over all hung the benediction which was the sky.

"Damned if he ain't right!" muttered Pittsburg Joe. "Who'd think a nut would notice scenery?"

"What's that gotta do with anything?" demanded Huggins. "We don't want nobody coming here until after we pull this job and beat it."

"Lookut," said Travers, who had been thinking behind his expressionless mask. "Slim, you and me almost had a run in already over bringing in wood and getting water from the pump and washing dishes and all that damned truck. Joe don't like it, neither. This dummy can't tell nothing because he don't know enough to understand what he hears and couldn't repeat it if he did. I'll see his old man and find out if he wants to let Tiny work for us."

"I got another idea, too. If we can frame this guy to keep the cops busy even a day it'll put us that much in the clear. Believe me, we'll be hot! For when the Bowling jewels leave home it's going to mean headlines! Every dick in the country is going to be on his toes!"

"You're nuts!" sneered Huggins. "Not even a hick constable would believe that this bird pulled a job bigger than swiping an apple out of some farmer's orchard!"

"Be yourself!" exclaimed Travers, coldly. "I ain't that dumb! But between now and Labor Day I can think of some way of working Tiny in so we'll have the bulls guessing for a day, maybe. With everything all set the way it is and twenty-four hours start we'll be sitting pretty. The only thing that's worried me at all has been the getaway."

"They'll be going over this country with a gang of troopers. All right. We're gone. One of the first things they do will be to run down the city guys that come up here for the trout fishing. If we can get 'em puzzled over the trail right here at the start we're so much better off.

Hell! I was brought up in the country. Any smart fox would do the same thing!"

Huggins snorted; sat down at the table and began to shuffle the cards.

"Have it your own way," he said, ungraciously. "I'm sick of washing dishes. But I bet this nitwit won't know enough to bring water!"

"I'll try him," said Pittsburg Joe. He pointed at two pails in the littered sink. "Tiny, go get water!"

"Do chores," replied the giant, with a grin of delight threatening to reach his ears. He took the pails and went out.

"I'll learn him about the dishes," volunteered Joe. "I'm as sick of walking back and forth with them water pails as you are of dishwashing, Slim. Next job I do ain't going to be in the sticks!"

"You won't never have to do another," Travers assured him. "If this one don't slip. Jake Gutman, the fence, told me just what Mrs. Roger Bowling's got. A string of pearls that's tops. Some star sapphires. A ruby necklace. And about a pint of diamonds. He put the screws on a maid she had and got it straight, along with the safe combination."

THEY'RE sent from New York for her to wear at the Labor Day ball at Champlain Gables. All right. She goes home after the ball and puts 'em in the old fashioned wall safe in the library. The Bowlings are going back to the city the next day. Half the servants is gone.

"We've cased that joint until I can call every tree by its first name. Slim has figgared out the work on the screens. I ain't going to have no trouble with that safe combination. Anyway the box was built when George Washington was chopping down the cherry tree."

"The only weak spot is the getaway. Sooner or later they're going to trail us to New York. If we can hold 'em up a day here we got plenty of time to see Gutman and cash in and get a good start south. That's where Tiny's going to come in."

"Nerts!" ejaculated Huggins.

"It's an idee," admitted Pittsburg Joe, "if you can think up something."

"Dicky Travers can think up something between now and Labor Day!"

Tiny came in with two pails of water. Pittsburg Joe got out the dishpan and piled it full of a day's accumulation of dishes.

"Wash 'em!" he said.

"Wash dishes," repeated Tiny, happily. He filled the teakettle and set it on the stove.

"He'll do," nodded Joe. "Better go down and see his old man, Dicky. We don't want no troopers up here searching for a lost idiot. We all three been mugged and besides if they ask us about trout fishing we don't know enough to talk sensible about it."

When Dicky Travers came back, late in the afternoon, Tiny was splitting kindling. Travers watched him from the window for a moment in silence before he went on into the house.

"It's all right," he said, to the others. "Tiny's old man is kind of simple too. Makes a living at odd jobs and I guess he's glad to get Tiny boarded free for a while. Eats like a horse, he says, and won't work anywhere unless he gets the notion. Always running away into the woods. We're set, for I'm beginning to get an idea how I can use him."

Travers paused and laughed.

"I'd like to see the cops running around in circles when they go up against Tiny!"

THE Bowling robbery was as well planned as an affair of the kind could be. It was, in fact, much better arranged in advance than many a military campaign. Prowling by night and spying by day, and making insidious acquaintance with the servants of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Bowling, the three robbers, each with long experience in crime had learned every step of the way they had to go in order to possess themselves of the Bowling jewels.

Moreover, they were favored by fortune in various ways. The jewels were insured as a matter of course and this, perhaps, relaxed the vigilance of the owners. Although it was supposed to be a secret that Mrs. Bowling was going to wear them at the final ball of the season at Champlain Gables, those things are confided from one person to another until they become almost public knowledge. There could be many suspects.

At four o'clock of the morning after the ball Huggins, Travers and Pittsburg Joe waited under one of the library windows of the Bowling home. Tiny was with them. He had been told to keep quiet and he had obeyed, just as he had obeyed every command that had been given him.

The Bowlings had come home from the ball half an hour before. At that time the four men had moved from the shelter of a grove of ornamental trees up to the house wall. Now they were listening, waiting for the last faint sound in the house to die away.

"All right now!" whispered Travers, at last.

Slim Huggins rose up, a dim figure in the grey starlight. A half minute, and the screen was lowered to the grass without a sound. Huggins vanished inside. Then his dark bulk appeared in the window.

"Clear!" he breathed.

Pittsburg Joe remained crouched under the window. Travers took Tiny by the arm and led him slowly up to the dark opening.

"No noise!" he ordered. "Go in!"

"No noise!" repeated Tiny, in the same sibilant tone that Travers had used. Tiny had been provided with rubber soled shoes. Every button that could scrape had been removed from his clothing. Huggins received him, steadied him in the darkness.

The three men stood together, Travers with his hand on Tiny's arm. From the house came no sound at all except the distant ticking of a large clock. Travers produced a pencil-thin stream of light from his hand. Everything had been rehearsed,

each movement planned, and every possible interruption anticipated. In his pocket Huggins even had tape and chloroform.

Travers moved toward one wainscoted wall. Under his hand a small painting swung outward like the door of a cupboard. Behind it the light revealed a steel knob. Travers twirled the knob, right, left, right. The safe opened. He reached in and took out a leather walletlike object as large as a brief case. He looked inside. Then it went under his coat, into the pocket which he had prepared for it in the lining.

Travers, like Joe and Huggins, wore rubber gloves such as surgeons use. No fingerprint had been left, not even on the screen. Now Travers crossed the room to where Huggins and Tiny waited by the window. No words were needed. Huggins stepped swiftly to the door of the library. It was his work to listen for a sound of movement from the floors above. They had had to risk this before because it was necessary to have someone with Tiny.

Travers led the silent giant across the room to the safe. He lifted Tiny's hand and closed his fingers around the knob. Tiny grunted faintly with pleasure and turned it back and forth. But Travers pulled him away almost immediately, to the bookshelves. He set Tiny's fingers on a small volume and then put it on the floor, open and face down. That smooth leather binding would take prints.

A small china figure of a dog, a bright silver ash tray, went into Tiny's pockets. Travers snatched up a red sofa pillow and carried that with him as he led Tiny back to the window. He stood on tiptoe and whispered.

"No noise, Tiny! Go out!"

They were back on the ground again, and in a moment more they were in the clump of ornamental trees. No chance of being seen now. Time was precious, of course, but there was no longer any breathless tension, nor need for nerve racking haste and absolute silence.

"Jeeze!" whispered Slim Huggins. "That's over!"

"Not yet," said Travers. "We ain't safe short of New York and the servants will be up back there before we hit the big town. The heat'll be on. But Tiny's going to take it for us!"

Once more they were in the kitchen of the mountain camp. The night was cool, but sweat glistened on the forehead of Pittsburg Joe and around his dyed handlebar moustache he looked pinched and drawn. He sat down limply and reached for a bottle on the table.

"I'm getting old," he said. "But what a haul!"

THE case was open on the table. In the light of the kerosene lamps the rubies gave out of their depths a richness of red beauty that told why women wore them, why men fought and died for them. The diamonds flashed blue fire. The star sapphires lay aloof and exquisite.

"One drink," announced Travers, "and then we've got to move!"

"I need two," said Huggins. "Something's got me worried. This has went off too easy."

"We ain't through yet!" Travers said in a metallic voice.

Tiny stood a little awkwardly in the middle of the room, fingering over and over the pillow of bright silk. He was grinning, as usual, but there was something a little different about the expression that stretched his large face now. He looked uncertainly from one to another of the men.

"Tiny," said Travers, "we're going for a drive. You stay home and go to bed!"

"Me go too!"

"No!" barked Travers. "You want pillow? You want dog?"

He touched the pillow, took the dog out of Tiny's pocket.

"Uh-huh!" The giant reached eagerly for the china dog.

"You stay home then!"

"All right!" Tiny sat down.

"And go to bed!"

"Me go to bed!"

"That's done!" Travers' shoulders jerked nervously. His mouth was a thin, grim line. "I had the right hunch on him from the time he first come in. It's like sticking your finger into putty. You put an idea in his head and there it is!"

"Nerts!" ejaculated Huggins, with a shrug. "It ain't done any harm but it won't do no good!"

"It'll do a lot of good," said Travers, throwing a drink down his throat with a movement of his arm and reaching for the bottle of gin. "By seven they'll find the safe open. The cops'll dust for prints. They'll get up here in an hour or so and find Tiny with that junk and take his prints.

"They'll begin to wonder if maybe he didn't just wander in there and find the safe open. The Bowlings might have been a little lit up last night when they come in and left it open. Common sense'll tell the cops a dummy like him couldn't do big time stuff but they'll fuss around and every hour means so many miles for us! I'm going to slip one of them little rings into his pocket. That'll mix things up some more."

Travers picked a ring set with a small square cut diamond from the case and crossed to Tiny's chair. Tiny rose slowly. Travers dropped the ring into his side pocket.

INSTANTLY several things happened with incredible speed. Tiny's left arm shot out and went around the neck of Travers. His fist lifted Travers' chin and pressed inward with deadly force. With lightning speed the other big hand snatched the pistol from Travers' shoulder holster and he whirled.

There was no word spoken. At the first move Slim Huggins had gone for his pocket and Pittsburg Joe's hand was inside his coat. Their weapons were jerked out when Tiny fired with incredible speed. Huggins sank backward, sickly green. His arm dropped to the table. He clamped his hand to his shoulder.

Pittsburg Joe had stood up to take deliberate aim. Tiny sidestepped,

swinging Travers' helpless head up to the level of his chin, and the two men fired together. A bullet raked Tiny's ear. But Pittsburg Joe fell backward over his chair, rolled and staggered to his feet with his gun hand dripping red.

Travers suddenly went limp in the crook of Tiny's arm and his body hung like a pendulum. He slid to the floor in a ridiculous, pudgy heap. Tiny felt of his ear, shook his head, took a couple of swift steps to one side so that he could cover the three men at once.

All the kindly vacuity had gone from his face. It had become terrible, with eyes blazing like black coals above the tanned expanse of cheeks and jowls. Slowly, then, that look began to fade. He did not grin, but the fighting rage died from his eyes and weariness gathered around them.

"Boys," he said, "you might as well give up. I've fixed the distributor on your car so it won't start. My partner who's been playing daddy for me in the village will be here any minute now. And there'll be half a dozen troopers closing in pretty soon. We didn't want to take any chances, in case you bumped me off!"

Slim Huggins licked his lips.

"Halfwit!" he whispered, hoarsely. "A phony!"

"I used to be on the stage," Tiny told him. "Hairy ape roles, and the village idiot. So it came natural. The stage stuff was phony. This is real and I like it better!"

"Who in the devil are you, anyway?"

"Stoner of Gibraltar Indemnity," said Tiny. "My company carried five hundred thousand on the Bowling jewels!"

"Who squealed?" asked Pittsburg Joe, in a pain-wrenched voice. "Somebody rattled!"

The weariness seemed to flow from Stoner's eyes and take possession of all his face. Even the mouth that had been set so long in a good natured grin drooped a little at the corners. He shook his head slowly.

(Concluded on page 144)

Corpses Tell No Tales, but in this Story

Death Writes

By L. FRANK BURLESON



BIG JIM TALBERT slipped the safety catch off his silencer-equipped automatic. Deliberately he leveled the wicked gat at the athletic young man who was seated on the couch. In a low, hard tone, he said:

"Well, Bill, you're gonna die—an' then you won't take any more girls away from me!"

Bill Stacey laughed easily. Even in the face of death he wasn't afraid. Tall and strong, he was pitcher for the baseball team that had just won the world series. On the couch beside him was a large pile of baseballs. He held a baseball in one hand and a fountain pen in the other. Evidently he had been autographing baseballs for a few of his many fans. Deliberately he wrote something on the ball in his hand as he said slowly:

"Talbert, I can't help it if Janet loves me better than she does you, but being she does—I'm glad of it. Of course, if I die, you might win her—if the cops don't get you for my murder."

Big Jim Talbert snarled. His florid face became almost apoplectic. He was a guy who couldn't stand being beaten in anything. Immaculate in evening clothes, his big jowls trembling with rage, he looked brutal as he stood crouched there before the couch. Despite his anger, he was cool.

He leaned forward to see that Stacey hadn't written any message on the baseball that the cops would see. He ordered Stacey to turn the ball around and around. Talbert

looked closely but he saw nothing on the ball except Stacey's signature.

Stacey laid the fountain pen on the couch, changed the baseball to his right hand.

Talbert suddenly caught the significance of that move. But before he could jerk his body sideward, Stacey acted.

Stacey's right hand, clutching the baseball, went back, shot forward.

Talbert fired and dodged simultaneously. But he wasn't quick enough. He saw a red spot appear suddenly in Stacey's chest—then he felt the baseball strike his own chest. He went over backward, sprawled on the floor as Stacey lunged to his feet. Talbert jerked his gun up, emptied it into the onrushing ball-player.

STACEY flopped down, dead before he struck the floor.

Talbert got to his feet slowly, put his gat away. He had stolen the automatic and he would throw it away as soon as he left the apartment.

Quickly, Talbert searched the baseball player's apartment, took all the money he found. He dropped a bill on the floor in the bedroom on purpose. The cops would think robbery was the motive for the murder. He, Talbert, would never be suspected. But even if he was, he had a good alibi.

Chuckling over his success, Talbert straightened his clothes and then left the apartment by way of the fire-escape.

The ringing doorbell awakened Talbert next morning. His spine was tingling with fear as he got out of bed and pulled a robe over his pajamas. He didn't usually have visi-

tors this early. Had the cops found a clue that pointed toward him? Nonsense! He had left no clues!

But when he went into the living room and opened the door, he stiffened. A big, rugged man with huge shoulders and a jutting chin stood before him. Before Talbert could speak the man pushed past him into the room, right hand in his bulging coat pocket.

Talbert stepped back, words of protest dying in his throat.

The big guy heeled the door shut, planted his enormous shoulders against it and announced himself bluntly.

"I'm Detective Hogan. Bill Stacey, the big baseball pitcher, was bumped last night. Robbery was evidently the motive, but I nosed around an' learned that you two guys hated each other like poison. Stacey stole your gal, I understand. I learned that you usually get what you want—regardless. So I kinda suspect you did the job. An' I think I can prove you did."

DETECTIVE HOGAN paused, lighted a cigarette.

Talbert's brain was racing. The detective thought he could prove it, huh? But how could he prove it—when he, Talbert, had left no clues?

Detective Hogan went on: "Stacey had been autographin' baseballs just before he died. His name was on a baseball that was on the floor. I think the signature on that ball is gonna fry you—"

A wave of fear gripped Talbert. A signature? Yeah, he had seen Bill

Stacey's signature on the baseball that Stacey had thrown at him, but how could Stacey's name convict him of murder?

"Get into the bedroom, you!" Detective Hogan said.

Talbert moved into the bedroom with the detective at his heels, stopped in the center of the room.

"Well?" he asked with a sneer.

Detective Hogan looked around the room, went to the closet and got out the evening clothes which Talbert had worn last night. He examined the clothes carefully, put them all back in the closet except the stiff dress shirt. He stepped close to Talbert, held out the shirt and said coldly:

"You did do it, Talbert! Listen—Bill Stacey was autographin' baseballs, as I said, when you bumped 'im. He had just written his name on a ball when you walked in—or he did it while you were talkin' to him. Well, Stacey was no coward; he put up a fight. He threw the ball at you. It hit you in the chest. Remember he had just written his name on the ball. The ink hadn't dried. An' that name was stamped on your shirt— It's a kind of death signature—'cause it'll fry you!"

Talbert was staring, terrified, at the shirt, at the scrawled, upside down letters which, read backward, spelled, "Bill Stacey." The letters blurred before his horrified eyes and he lunged suddenly at the detective.

Detective Hogan swung his ham-like fist once—hard.

Talbert was out before he hit the floor.

In Coming Issues of POPULAR DETECTIVE

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NOSED OUT

*Sheriff Bob Grantley
Tackles the Toughest
Problem of His
Career!*

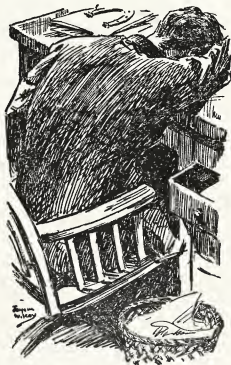
By **GEORGE
A. McDONALD**

*Author of "Mark of Death,"
"The Black Shadow Murders," etc.*

THE late afternoon sun, streaming through the dingy windows, etched deeper the lines around Sheriff Bob Grantley's



"Ever seen that trinket before, Sheriff?"



mouth. Beneath the brim of his shapeless felt hat, a deep V showed between his straight black brows, but his tanned, leathery face was expressionless except for his grey eyes. They were dark pools of misery as they lifted from the crumpled body of Oliver Forrester, sprawled across his desk, in the office of the Piedmont Lumber Company.

It was not the sight of the murdered man that had turned Bob Grantley's youthful face into a dark granite mask. Nor had it been affection for the murdered man that brought the set twist to his lips. Grantley had witnessed death before, in the months that had passed since Governor Rayburn had appointed him to fill the unexpired term of Pete Hollis on the death of Centralia's former sheriff. He had studied death in all its phases, in his crime detection studies at Northwestern State.

A small, trifling object had set cold fingers of fear clutching at the blood in his veins, despite the fact that the thermometer of Tod Dorgan's saloon registered a hundred and four. The small object was a cameo watch charm, set in a thin, worn ring of gold. A broken link glittered in the ribbon of sunlight that cut across Forrester's desk, just beyond the tips of the thick, stubby fingers.

Bob Grantley's brain whirled as his eyes flicked over the vindictive, heavy jowled face of Dorgan, the saloon keeper; past the dark, sardonic features of Duke Hollis, his deputy, and came to rest, in a glance that was all but pleading, on the lovely face of Helen Forrester, the daughter of the murdered man.

But if Grantley looked for a flicker of sympathy in the pallid, delicately oval face framed in the nimbus of ash blond hair, he was doomed to disappointment. Forrester's daughter was a cold, implacable enemy as she returned his stare.

A STIFLING silence had fallen, broken only by the buzzing of a fly at the dingy window pane. Dorgan broke it sharply growling:

"Ever see that trinket before, Sheriff?"

"Yes, I've seen it." Grantley's lips moved stiffly, his voice flat. "It belongs to John Dean—my step-father."

A soft, sibilant sound came from Duke Hollis' lips. His black, agate eyes gleamed spitefully as they fixed on Helen Forrester's pale face.

"What do yuh reckon to do about it?" questioned Dorgan, his fat face twisted in a malevolent sneer. "Goin' to treat him like any other ornery murderer?"

"If John Dean murdered Forrester—he'll pay the penalty."

The words wrung themselves from Bob Grantley's heart. John Dean, the broken, almost crippled old man who had invested his life savings in an education for his idolized stepson, so Bob Grantley wouldn't have

to be crippled in the Piedmont Lumber Mill, or ruin his lungs in the cotton mills, as had so many of Centra's youths. John Dean—a murderer. It couldn't be—

"If he's guilty?" Hollis' voice was scathing. "Who else could be guilty? Dean's hated Forrester for fifteen years; threatened to gun him 'cause he got crippled in the Piedmont Saw Mill. It don't take no great shakes of college learnin' to figger who killed Forrester. D'yuh think so, Helen?"

A shudder went through the girl, then accusing eyes drove hard at Bob Grantley's face. Her voice was sharp-edged with hysteria.

"If you don't arrest John Dean for—for my father's murder, Bob Grantley—I'll telephone the governor—to remove you from office."

Anger drove the blood into Bob Grantley's face. Only last week Helen Forrester had told him she was proud of him; had complimented him on the way he was facing the ill-will and hatred of the natives of the town who resented the appointment of a college dude as sheriff, instead of Duke Hollis, the son of the former sheriff. Then bitterness swept Bob Grantley, leaving him sick.

To jail John Dean as a murderer—the thought brought the taste of bitter gall to his throat. Supposing the proud, quick-tempered old man refused to go to jail? To have to use force or a six-gun on his foster-parent—Grantley shuddered inwardly at the thought. Failing in his duty, he would lose Helen Forrester's friendship, as well as his own self respect. And if John was arrested and convicted, the girl would never love a relative of her father's murderer.

Bitterly Grantley cursed the day he had pinned a sheriff's badge to his shirt. He wanted to tear it off, throw it in Duke Hollis' sneering face and walk out of the whole rotten mess. But the badge was his.

"You say you saw Dean coming out of the office, Dorgan?" he asked levelly. "Yet you didn't hear any

shot? Your place is just a stone's throw across the lot there."

"I seen Dean go in the front door. Along 'bout a half hour later he ducked out the back way an' went limp'in' up the alley. I knowed him an' Oliver were mortal enemies. When Oliver didn't come in like he allus does for a four o'clock snifter, I got worried a leetle. I seen Duke an' Helen ridin' into town so I stepped out an' told 'em they oughter drop in on the old man. This is what they found."

A spasm of pain contracted the pupils of Bob Grantley's eyes. His voice was harsh as he said to Helen:

"Your dad always took the payroll up to the mill on Thursday. Why didn't he go today?"

"He was going later than usual today. He was going to have supper at the mill commissary."

"Did you know Swanson, the mill foreman, was in here yesterday and quarreled with your father?"

Something like contempt showed in the girl's eyes as she replied:

"Dad and Swanson were always quarreling. Father threatened to fire him for drinking on the job. Swanson tried to bluff it out, but then he begged for another chance, which father gave him."

"Swanson's mean and ornery," Grantley said stubbornly. "He killed a man in a North Carolina mill three years ago."

Duke Hollis sniffed audibly, and walked around the office. His eyes slithered about. Suddenly his swarthy face lighted.

"Take a look in that waste-basket, Grantley. There's wrappers from rolls o' silver there. Forrester was workin' on the payroll this afternoon. The satchel he carries the money in is gone and so is the money. There was robbery connected with this murder, as well as revenge. An' John Dean allus swore he'd git the money that he reckoned was owin' to him for his bein' crippled up at the saw mill."

Grantley walked around the desk. His eyes probed at the basket and his heart skipped a beat. Then his

glance picked up colored cloth beneath the torn wrappings.

He picked up a faded bandanna, found it was damp to his touch. A frown furrowed his forehead and he smoothed the damp, crumpled cloth. The middle of the bandanna was riddled with jagged, circular holes.

"That accounts for not hearing the shot," he muttered, half aloud. "The killer wrapped a wet bandanna around the muzzle of his gun. It muffled the sound and killed the blaze from the shot."

He lifted the bandanna to his nose, nodding.

"Been fired through, all right," he muttered. He scanned the floor, then went out the rear door into the alley. Hollis was right at his heels. Grantley walked a few yards, searching the refuse and dirt that littered the alley.

He bent swiftly, then rose, and his wide shoulders slumped. A choked sigh slipped between his clenched teeth as he stared at the revolver he had picked up. He had seen that gun a thousand times around the little shack where he and John Dean kept bachelor quarters since Bob's mother's death seven years before.

WITH stiff fingers he broke the gun, looked at the swing cylinder with one exploded shell. A faint odor of cordite struck his nostrils as he held the barrel to his nose. The gun had been fired recently.

Avoiding the gleam in Duke Hollis' eyes, he swung on his heel and stalked swiftly back to the office. Tod Dorgan's porcine eyes glinted on the gun.

"Yuh found the murder weapon, eh?" he growled. "Looks like the one John Dean use to tote."

"It's Dean's gun, Dorgan," rasped the sheriff. He turned to the girl.

"You don't really believe John murdered your father, Helen? John's no killer. He rants a lot, but he wouldn't shoot an unarmed man."

The girl met the pleading look in his eyes unflinchingly.

"I think John Dean is the murderer. He should be executed—it's your duty to see that he is. I want to see you do your duty."

"All right," rasped Grantley. "I'll do my duty. Then I'll shake the dust of Centralia from my heels as fast as God will let me!"

Duke Hollis' sardonic laugh rang in his ears as he pounded out of the mill office and ploughed up the dust-packed road to the shack he called home. A bitter twist curled his lips as he saw the two skimpy geraniums in tin cans in the window. They were John's flower garden. Out back was a tiny plot where the crippled old man tried to raise vegetables. John Dean's life was centered in this little shack—and in his six-foot stepson—who now had to take the old man to jail.

Thirty minutes later, Bob Grantley came back down the road, leading his horse by the bridle. John Dean's bent, twisted figure plodded at the sheriff's side. The old man's faded blue eyes never left the dirt road until they went up the steps to the brick jail. Duke Hollis leaned against the door jamb, thumbs hooked in his gun belt.

"So yuh brought him peaceful-like?" Hollis' voice was regretful.

"Yes, damn you, I brought him peacefully," clipped Grantley. "He's going into a cell. I want you to see that he stays there."

"What d'yuh mean, Grantley?" asked Hollis sharply.

"I'm riding out to the Piedmont Saw Mill to find out where Swanson was this afternoon. I won't be back until after sun-down. If anything happens to John Dean while I'm gone—this state won't be big enough to hide the feller that's responsible."

"Yuh mean—something like a lynchin'?" drawled Hollis.

"I mean—anything at all that prevents Dean from getting a fair trial by law!"

For a long minute grey eyes and black locked in blazing anger. Bleak rage contorted the faces of the two rivals. Fingers hovered over gun butts.

Hollis' gaze dropped first. His voice quivered with rage as he said: "Dean'll be here when yuh git back, Sheriff. I'm sworn to uphold the law, same as you."

Bob Grantley hardheeled across the brick floor with his prisoner. The iron door clanged in the cell. Soft voices drifted to the door. Then the grim-jawed young sheriff jerked his hat low on his forehead, stomped out, swung in the saddle and faded down the street in a cloud of dust, without a backward glance,

FLICKING lights threw dancing shadows across Main Street as Sheriff Bob Grantley rode back into town. He threw his reins over the hitching-pole in front of Dorgan's saloon. His eyes raked the street, and a clipped oath dropped as he stared at the lighted windows of Jim Bass, the local undertaker and coroner.

Four figures showed through the lighted pane. Grantley recognized Helen Forrester, Doc Giles, Duke Hollis and Jim Bass. The coroner's inquest was over. John Dean probably faced a charge of first degree murder.

Grantley swept into the undertaking parlor like a young tornado. His glance seared the gathering, then rested on Helen Forrester.

"I want you to come over to Dorgan's place, Helen," he clipped.

Helen Forrester stared at the expressionless, bronze face blankly.

"You want me to go—into Dorgan's saloon?" she gasped. "Are you crazy?"

"You said you wanted to see your father's murderer punished. Come along then."

Grantley swung on his heel, clumped out of the undertaking parlor. The girl got up and followed him, startled into wordless acquiescence. The men followed, dumb with amazement.

The loud cacophony of sound in the saloon dropped to a hushed silence as Grantley stalked in, held the door open and then stepped in front of Helen Forrester. His eyes went

along the bar, stopping on the hard white face of Swanson, the Piedmont foreman.

Dorgan and his bartender gazed open-mouthed. It was the first time a lady had visited the saloon. Dorgan found his tongue at last.

"What'll it be, Sheriff?" he asked heartily.

Bob Grantley's feet spread a little on the sawdust floor. His elbows and forearms rested flatly on the bar.

"Dorgan," he rasped savagely. "I'm arresting you—for the murder of Oliver Forrester! Come out—with your hands in the air!"

Dorgan's piggish eyes widened and his heavy jawls shook like jelly.

"What—what d'yuh mean, Grantley?" he choked. "The killer's in jail right now, ain't he? Are yuh tryin' to devil me, Sheriff?"

"You heard me, Dorgan. Come out here."

Dorgan's eyes gleamed with red hate. His thick voice snarled:

"Like hell I will, Grantley. You ain't goin' to saddle me with no killin' that yore murderin' stepfather done, yuh college dude!"

A voiceless growl rumbled along the front of the bar. Grantley knew the townspeople were ready to burst into flaming hostility. The hair lifted along his neck, but his voice was steady as he growled:

"It was a smooth scheme, Dorgan, but you slipped on one little point. You sent the Dreyfus kid to tell John that Forrester wanted to talk with him. Then you stole the watch-charm and gun from John's room. The stage was all set for a neat murder scheme. You even figured how to silence the gun so you'd have an alibi for not hearing the gunshot."

"But when you soaked the bandanna you used as a silencer, you dipped it in the bar water where you wash your beer glasses. The smell of beer and liquor is still hanging to the cloth. And John Dean never touched a drop of beer or liquor in his life—"

Dorgan's fat face went grey. For a minute he stood flat-footed, a hulk-

ing mountain of inert flesh. Then he turned, and his speed belied his huge bulk. His shining bald head went out of sight behind the bar. When it lifted, his eyes were lined along the barrel of a gun.

But Bob Grantley's motions had been fully as swift. He whirled, and his swift shove toppled Helen Forrester into the arms of Doc Giles. Giles sensed the play, grabbed the girl and pulled her away from danger.

The sheriff whipped around, his right arm flashing down and up. The walls of the saloon reverberated with the double roar of guns. A single crash echoed—then stillness came like a dark blanket. Bob Grantley's knees buckled and a thin streak of red showed through the shoulder of his flannel shirt. He stiffened, blazing eyes focused on the killer behind the bar.

Dorgan wavered on his feet, clutching at the crimson spot that stained his white apron just over his heart. His voice rattled in his throat, then his knees sagged and he slumped, pitching out of sight behind the bar.

HELEN FORRESTER screamed and buried her face in Doc Giles' coat. He patted her head absently, turned to Jim Bass.

"Reckon we won't need any inquest on this case, Jim," he grunted. "Tod sort o' convicted hisself, grabbin' fer his gun like that." His shrewd eyes fixed on Grantley's face. "Pretty smart work, young feller."

Grantley's shoulders sagged and his voice was weary.

"Swanson admitted he'd been here quarreling with Forrester, but they fixed up their trouble. Oliver told him he'd be out late with the payroll today. Swanson stopped in for a drink to taper off on, and he let it slip about the payroll being late, talking to Dorgan. No one else, except Helen, knew that Forrester hadn't gone out to the saw mill this afternoon, like he always did. So it just had to be Dorgan—or Swanson.

(Concluded on page 142)

*Bill Hafey, Private Detective, Takes a New Trail
When the Jaws of a Criminal Trap Close on Him!*



"Somebody," Hafey said, had strong hands!"

The SILENT MEN

By HUGH B. CAVE

Author of "Crimson Trails," "The Preying Hands," etc.

BILL HAFEY left the offices of the Beacon Agency at nine o'clock that evening and walked down Stuart Street with the intentions of catching a bite to eat at Dominico's.

The big green sedan slid up to him before he had gone two blocks. Three men were in the car. One of them, sleek-haired, coarsely good-

looking and not over thirty, straightened on the curb and walked along beside Bill Hafey for a few strides.

"Hello, Hafey," he said softly.

Bill Hafey stopped. He stopped because the man was walking uncomfortably close to him and because something hard in the man's coat pocket was making a dent in Bill Hafey's hip.

"Got a job for you," the fellow said.

Hafey stood very still. He knew that the thing in the fellow's pocket was a gun, and he knew, by the thin-lipped smile on the man's unlovely face, that the gun would very likely perform if Bill Hafey decided to send up a howl or make other kinds of trouble.

Stuart Street was dark and more or less deserted. If the gun exploded pushing a slug deep into Bill Hafey's intestines, its owner would have very little trouble making a getaway in the green sedan which was slowly purring through slush along the curb.

"Sure," Hafey said. "Sure, I get it."

The rear door of the sedan was open, waiting for him. He walked stiffly toward it, climbed it. The sleek-haired man slid in beside him, closed the door and said to the driver:

"Okay, Steve."

The car swung left on Huntington Avenue. Bill Hafey sat quite still with concealed guns denting both sides of his small, hard body. He didn't care for that, especially when the machine hit holes in the road.

"What is this?" he said after a while.

"You're a pretty good detective, ain't you?"

"Sure, but—"

"We got a job for you."

The machine went out Huntington to the Parkway and took the South Shore route through Forest Hills. When an hour had droned by, Bill Hafey's uneasiness increased.

"Say, listen—" he said.

"Shut up!"

They blindfolded him then, one of them holding a gun against his stomach, while the other wrapped a scarf round his eyes and sealed it with adhesive tape. Swiftly they went through his clothes, taking his gun from the shoulder holster. They pushed him to the floor and put their feet on him, and the car again picked up speed.

Cramped and blindfolded, Bill Hafey did some hard, slow thinking. This was a snatch and he was the victim. There might be many motives behind it, none of them consoling. Many men had reason to hate the diminutive but well-known Beacon Agency dick, because many men had felt the talons of the law into whose clutches Bill Hafey had escorted them.

This, unless something intervened, might well be the beginning of the end of Bill Hafey's dynamic career. Not a pleasant thought.

Then the machine crunched over a gravel driveway and the door squeaked open. Hafey felt heavy hands dragging him out.

HE offered no resistance. Cold damp air in his lungs informed him that he was somewhere near the ocean, and common sense told him that he was being lugged into a building—perhaps a deserted summer home—which his three captors and maybe others of their ilk had turned into a hideout. A door slammed shut behind him, he was lugged over a carpeted floor, and dumped ungently into a chair.

He suffered sudden agony when cruel hands ripped the taped bandage from his eyes.

He stared around him.

He was in a big living room, well furnished, with built-in bookcases, expensive gimcrackery, and an abundance of half-empty whiskey bottles on a table. Apparently it was the living room of a pretentious South Shore summer home, and quite obviously the home belonged to none of the men who sat peering at Bill Hafey.

There were six of them, counting the three who had brought him here. The coarsely good-looking young man was apparently self-nominated master of ceremonies.

"Take a good look around," he grinned. "You're livin' here for a while."

Hafey nodded. The fact that he was to live for a while was a pleasant surprise. Less pleasant were sounds

of sea-wind howling in the upper reaches of the house, and sounds of heavy shutters banging at closed windows. It was impossible to see out of those windows. Every shade was drawn.

Lamplight showed him strange faces. They stared at him. None bore even a trace of humor. The man named Steve, driver of the car, slouched forward and stood beside the sleek-haired one and said curtly:

"Let's put him to work and get it over with, Tony."

The others said nothing. They looked like brothers, Hafey thought. They were big men, all four of them, with blank, colorless faces, sunken eyes and thick lips. Steve turned to them, said slowly and distinctly, enunciating each word with care:

"This guy is Bill Hafey, Beacon Agency. One of the best dicks in town. That okay with you?"

Two of the men nodded. One of them swung to the other two and made signs with his fingers. Tony leered at Bill Hafey.

"Dummies," Tony said. "Two of 'em can read lips. The whole four are deaf and dumb. They're brothers."

Bill Hafey felt an eeriness in the room. The howl of the wind upstairs was responsible for that, maybe—and the idea of being held prisoner by a mob which included four deaf mutes undoubtedly added to it.

"I could use a swig of that liquor," he mumbled.

"Not a chance. You got work to do."

A gun came into Tony's hand and the face above it ceased smiling. "Upstairs, mug," Tony said. "And don't think we ain't playin' for keeps."

Hafey stood up. The man named Steve, small and wiry and unshaven, gripped his arm and pushed him forward. The others followed.

Bill Hafey walked into a long, dimly lighted hall, paced the length of it and climbed a winding staircase. The staircase was dusty. Evidently the big house had been deserted, along with other summer homes on the South Shore, since Labor Day or thereabouts. A win-

dow was open at the end of the upper corridor, and cold, damp air chilled the sweat on Hafey's face.

"In here," Steve said.

The door was closed. Steve opened it. Bill Hafey stepped over the threshold as Steve reached past him and snapped a wall-switch.

Hafey's eyes widened and stayed wide, staring.

He was in a bedroom. Shades were drawn at both windows, and blankets had been draped over them to prevent chinks of light from reaching into the windy darkness outside. The bed was a big wooden four-poster, and a straight-backed chair stood on the rug at the end of it.

The chair supported a woman. Her arms were bound to the slats behind her, her legs tied to the front chair-legs. She was young, not more than thirty, and was passably good-looking, with reddish hair, a sallow complexion and pale staring eyes.

She was also dead.

"All you gotta do," Tony said grimly, "is find out who killed her."

BILL HAFEY took a step forward and looked into the woman's face. Being snatched at gun-point and dragged blindfolded to investigate a murder case was something new in Hafey's list of experiences. New and different, and conducive to some queer sensations.

He turned, gasping at the men who stood watching him. The whole six had come trooping upstairs—the four dummies, diminutive Steve and the sleek-haired, sneering Italian whose name was Tony.

"I don't get it," Hafey mumbled.

"It's this way," Tony said quietly. "You're in a spot. There's six of us here, see? We been workin' together for months. But now one of us turns out to be a dirty double-crossin' rat—and you're here to name him."

Bill Hafey still didn't get it.

"This dame," Tony shrugged, "was a maid in the home of—never mind whose home. Anyhow, she was a maid before she got bumped off. We

(Continued on page 130)

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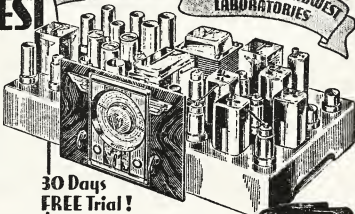
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(Continued from page 128)

brought her here, see? The idea is, she knew all about the house she worked in, which ain't far from here. So we brought her here to make her talk."

"Lay off," Steve growled. "You don't have to spill the whole—"

"I got to tell him enough so he'll know what we want, ain't I? Listen, mug. This dame knew the location of a safe, see? A safe where the guy she worked for kept a lot of dough. So we brought her here to make her talk, and she played clam with us. So we tied her in here and told her she'd starve until she loosened up. Get it?"

Bill Hafey nodded. Somehow he was more interested in the cold, inscrutable gaze of the four men who could neither hear nor speak, than in Tony's words. They were like ghouls who had come out of a dark, silent world of death.

"Well," Tony snarled, "the dame was murdered last night. That means one of us sneaked in here during the night and strangled the information out of her, and then kept on strangling her so she wouldn't be able to say who done it. It means that one of us six guys knows the location of that safe. And—"

"Your job Hafey," the diminutive Steve put in bluntly, "is to find out which one of us done the double-cross. We didn't get nowhere ourselves. You can't argue with these damn dummies anyhow; talkin' to them is like talkin' to a bunch o' dead men. So we come to an agreement about bringing a dick in here to look things over. All you got to do is find out who was in this room last night, and when you point out the guilty party, the other five of us'll take care of him our own way. Simple, ain't it?"

Bill Hafey put a hand to his face and wiped away the sweat. "Sure," he said, lamely. "Sure it's simple. And where do I get off this bandwagon?"

"When it's all over, you get dumped off on Stuart Street right where we picked you up."

Hafey felt better. Scowling, he walked away from his captors, looked down at the dead woman, then turned and said: "I work better alone. Any objections?"

"On this job," Steve growled, "you will work with an audience."

Hafey shrugged, returned his attention to the dead woman. Her eyes were open and glazed, looking up at him. She wore a shiny black dress that showed the bulge of her chest, and the pale skin above the neck of her dress was livid where strangling fingers had left their imprints. "Somebody," Hafey said, "had strong hands."

No answer came from his audience. When he turned, the four deaf mutes were lined up against the wall, two on each side of the door in slouching positions that didn't harmonize at all with the intent, unblinking stares they focused on him.

Steve, with a grim smile, was leaning against the edge of a bureau, one hand tapping a rhythmic beat on the front of the top drawer. Tony, still caressing the gun, had sidled over to a chair and was sitting there watching.

"Maybe this'll interest you," Steve said suddenly.

He slid the drawer open a few inches, jerked his hand into it. Bill Hafey walked over and lifted out a pad of paper, a pencil. The cover of the pad had been folded back; from the looks of it, only one or two sheets had been removed.

"That," Steve said, "proves to me that one of the dummies done the murder. I found that pad here this morning when I walked into the room and found her"—he jerked a thumb at the woman in the chair—"dead. It was on the floor near the chair."

"So you put it in the drawer?"

"Yeah. It looked like hot evidence, and I figured to keep right on knowing where to find it. Neither me nor Tony would've used a pad, sec? We'd have strangled the dame and made her talk. But the dummies—she'd have to write it down for 'em."

(Continued on page 132)



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(Continued from page 131)

Hafey looked long and hard at the pad, replaced it on the bureau and said softly: "Two of the dummies can read lips?"

"Yeah."

"Suppose you search the other two," Hafey suggested, "for the sheet of paper that was torn off this pad?"

"Suppose you search 'em. It's your party."

Hafey walked forward slowly, wondering just what would happen if he attempted to carry out Steve's suggestion. "Which two?" he said.

Sleek-haired Tony grinned crookedly. He was apparently enjoying the situation. "Them two," he said, pointing, "that look like they'd be real pleased to break you up in small pieces."

Hafey drew a deep breath and stepped closer. The two dummies stood motionless, glared at him, but made no move to repulse him. Hafey braced himself, summoned courage, reached out and pawed one man's pockets.

The fellow clamped a big hand on Hafey's shoulder and uttered a low, growling noise.

"Okay, okay," Hafey muttered. "I'm not doin' this because I want to!"

He searched them, stepped back at last, empty-handed. He mopped his face with a handkerchief and went back to the corpse. Tony, in the chair near the wall, said softly: "Smatter, gumshoe? Nervous?"

Bill Hafey examined the corpse. He poked at a jagged gash in the dead woman's cheek and looked carefully at her mouth, her throat, her bare arms. On one wrist he found a round white indentation where pale skin had been bruised and blood forced out of crushed blood vessels.

He straightened, stared at Tony. "Listen," he said sternly. "Is this on the level? You mean I got to name the guy who did this?"

"That's what you were brought here for."

"Suppose you or Steve did it?"

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"You're here to name the guy that did!"

"Only," Steve growled from beside the bureau, "me and Tony have a pretty good out, flatfoot. Don't forget this here pad of paper."

Bill Hafey said stiffly: "You asked for it, you birds. I'm looking for a ring—a ring with a round, sharp stone. It'll be a big one—"

"This is?" Tony thrust his left hand out, displaying a plain gold wedding band.

"I said a stone."

"The only one of us wears a ring like the one you're lookin' for," Steve said quietly, "is Adolph here. Yeah—Adolph, the big dummy you just got through friskin'. Go see what he's wearin'."

BILL HAFEY walked again to the dummy, looked down at the man's hands. The fingers were bare.

Hafey mopped his forehead. "I got to think," he muttered. "I got to be left alone, I tell you."

"Yeah?" The Italian, Tony, slouched erect, spun the gun in his fist and moved to the door. "Okay, Hafey. Only you don't eat until you're through, see? And if you don't get through damn soon, you don't eat again ever."

Bill Hafey slumped into a chair and sat there, staring at the door. He had been in tight spots before, but this one had every indication of being a oneway trip to hell. He had been here over an hour, and the journey from Stuart Street had consumed all of two hours before that. That would make the time about midnight. And he was cooped alone with a dead woman in a big house somewhere on the South Shore.

Wind howled a cold, dreary dirge against the room's two windows as Hafey pulled the blankets aside and peered out. Closed shutters met the gaze of his bloodshot eyes. All he knew was that the house was a big one, that he was in a room high above the ground floor, and that if he smashed the shutters and at-

(Continued on page 134)

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(Continued from page 133)

tempted to drop from a windowledge he would probably wind up with broken legs—and with bullets grinding into him.

He walked to the door, opened it and stood listening. There was a light glowing in the hall, a dozen feet distant. No sound came to him except the whine of the wind.

He closed the door, stared again at the corpse. Then, realizing his helplessness, he methodically inspected the murder room.

In a desk drawer he found pads of paper like the one on the bureau. Cheap pads, thick and heavy, labeled to contain one hundred sheets each. He picked up the pad on the bureau and counted the pages remaining in it. There were ninety-nine. One page, then, had been ripped off.

That page presumably contained the information which the woman in the chair had written, under pressure, for the man who had strangled the information out of her.

HAFEY fingered the top remaining sheet. It was coarse paper. He ran a thumb-nail along it and the nail sank deep, leaving a mark.

Scowling, he pushed the pad into his pocket and went again to the door and stood listening.

He had learned something, and the knowledge put dread in his eyes. Slowly and silently he paced down the hall to the head of the winding staircase. The stairs were dark.

He went down them one at a time, putting most of his weight against the heavy bannister. In the lower hall he stopped, heard voices from a room out back, and recalled, scowling, that Steve and Tony were the only members of the gang who could talk. The others were deaf and dumb.

Other sounds accompanied the voices. Sounds of poker chips clicking on a table, cards being shuffled and dealt. Hafey caught a slow, deep breath and started down the hall toward the front door.

The door was a long way off. In

the room behind him a chair scraped roughly; a voice—Tony's voice—said: "There's some in the other room. I'll get 'em." Hafey heard footsteps, slid sideways, and leaped across the living room threshold. He flattened behind the open door.

Footsteps pounded along the corridor. The sleek-haired Italian named Tony came striding into the living room, switched on a light, glanced around and walked toward a chair where a coat and vest were hanging. The coat was dragged down on one side by a weight in one of its bulging pockets.

Tony had his back to Bill Hafey. Unaware of Hafey's watching eyes, he put a hand in a pocket of the coat, fumbled around, pulled out a box of matches and a pack of cigarettes. Something gleamed dully in the light—and Bill Hafey's watching orbs narrowed. Tony kept the cigarettes, stuffed the matches back into the coat and strode out of the room.

Hafey waited, then slid over the threshold and again tiptoed toward the front door.

The corridor seemed a mile long, and Bill Hafey made no sound, knew that the men playing cards in the other room were unaware of his attempt to escape. Once he got outside, once that front door clicked shut behind him—But the door was a long way off, and—

He jerked to a halt and stood stiff. Less than ten paces ahead of him a menacing shape had sidled silently from the shadows and was leering at him. Hafey's hopes died. He gaped at the gun in the man's fist, looked above that into the face of one of the deaf mutes.

For a split second Bill Hafey weighed his chances; then he relaxed, realized the futility of hurling himself forward. Even without a gun the fellow was big enough to break little Bill Hafey's wiry body into two separate pieces.

He turned, saved the fellow a lot of trouble by walking quietly back along the corridor toward the room

(Continued on page 138)

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THE SILENT MEN

(Continued from page 135)

where the dummy's companions were playing cards. The fellow strode behind him silently. Hafey stepped over the threshold into the kitchen.

The men at the table turned to peer at him.

"I'll save you the sign-talk," Hafey muttered. "I was heading for a get-away and this louse stopped me. Now what?"

The man named Steve stood up, strode forward slowly and glared at close range into Hafey's face. He sneered, smashed the flat of his hand across the detective's mouth, hurled Hafey back against the wall.

"That'll show you!"

Hafey licked his lips but said nothing.

"So you figured on gettin' away before you finished the job," Steve growled. "Well, maybe you won't ever finish it now. Maybe—"

"It's finished," Hafey said.

"What?"

"I said it was finished."

The Italian, Tony, came forward and elbowed Steve aside. He said curtly: "You on the level with that?"

"Sure I'm on the level."

"All right," Tony snapped. "We'll hold a session in the big room and you can shoot your mouth off."

Bill Hafey stalled for time to think. "Now wait a minute—"

"You heard what I said. Get movin'!"

Between two guns Hafey walked slowly back to the living room and sat in a chair Tony pulled back for him. He sat directly under the glare of a lamp beside the big table. The others gathered around the table, and Steve, leaning forward on both elbows, glared and said: "Let's have it, Hafey."

Bill Hafey said slowly: "It's open and shut. Last night one of you mugs went into that room and made the woman talk, and then murdered her. This pad of paper"—he pulled the pad from his pocket and slapped it

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on the table—"is proof that the guy was a dummy. Being deaf, he had to have the woman write the information down for him."

"Go ahead," Tony snapped.

"Well, that limits it to two men, because two of these dummies can read lips and wouldn't have needed pencil and paper. Now then, whoever talked to the lady last night smashed her across the face and cut her cheek with a ring he was wearing. Then he turned the ring around on his finger and grabbed the woman's wrist and squeezed hard, with the stone jammed against the wristbone. That kind of torture would make anyone talk."

"Well?" Tony demanded.

"Well," Hafey said lamely, "the ring was a big one with a round, sharp stone. And Steve said before, upstairs, that Adolph here owns a ring like that."

The big, thick-shouldered deaf mute named Adolph made no move as the others turned to look at him. Unable to read the movements of Hafey's lips, he had understood nothing of the accusation made against him. He stiffened, though, when Tony's hand slid over the table and leveled a gun at him.

"I guess you solved it, Hafey," the Italian said softly.

Steve scowled, stared point blank at Hafey. "I ain't so sure. You can't put a guy away without evidence. Where's this all-important ring you're so keen about?"

Bill Hafey stood up. He felt oddly cold as he walked away from the table and headed for a chair which stood against one of the built-in bookcases. A coat and vest were draped over the chair-back.

"Who's coat is this?" he said.

"Adolph's," Tony growled.

"That's what I thought. I looked it over," Steve lied, "while I was snoopin' around in here."

He lifted the coat from the chair, put his right hand in one of the pockets and pulled out a box of matches. Then his fumbling fingers brought out a ring—a diamond ring with a round, sharp stone. He tossed it onto the table. "That it?" he de-

(Continued on page 140)



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(Continued from page 139)

manded. His other hand, hidden by the folds of the garment, slid into a bulging pocket and closed over the solid, comforting bulk of a gun.

The sleek-haired, thin-lipped Tony picked the ring up, looked at it, put it down again very slowly and glared ominously across the table at Adolph.

"Only Adolph didn't do it," Bill Hafey said.

The statement was a thunderclap. When the effects of it had died away, Hafey took a step forward—a step that carried him close to a big overstuffed chair which loomed beside a shuttered window. Ten paces still separated him from the table. Tony, Steve and the others were studying him with grim intentness.

"In the first place," Hafey said, "that pad of paper is a frame. Only one sheet has been torn off it, and if you ever find that sheet you'll find no writing on it. If a pencil had been put to that sheet, the marks would have gone through to the page under it. You're looking at that second page right now. Look close, and you won't find any marks except one I made with my own thumb-nail."

"So what?" Steve growled.

"So one of you guys planted the pad in the murder room and wore Adolph's ring to frame Adolph. Then the guilty man sneaked in here and planted the ring back in Adolph's pocket. Ask Tony what he did when he came in here for cigarettes!"

They asked Tony nothing. Gun in hand, the sleek-haired Italian lunged backward, staggered clear of the table and stood wide-legged, snarling.

The gun in his fist covered Steve, covered the four deaf mutes who sat gaping.

"You doublecrossin' rat!" Steve bellowed.

"Sure," Tony said. "Sure I'm a doublecrossin' rat! And I'd have got away with it only for your fool idea about bringin' a dick in to investigate. I'm gettin' away with it anyhow, see?" He backed to the door.

"And as for you, Hafey—"

He swung his gun on a dead line

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with Bill Hafey's chest, but Hafey's hidden weapon belched before the murder-gun had stopped swinging. The Italian jerked backward on tip-toe, his face a twisted mask of surprise and agony. He spun on one foot, pawed the air in front of him and crashed into the wall.

Steve, at the table, glared wildly at Bill Hafey and leaped to his feet, one hand pawing frantically at a shoulder holster. Bill Hafey fired again. The table shook as Steve crashed face down on top of it.

After that, Bill Hafey stepped out from behind the big overstuffed chair and strode forward. The gun in his fist kept the four deaf mutes in their chairs. They gaped at him, seemed horribly afraid of him as he walked backward, away from them, toward the door.

"I guess the cops won't have much front door and slammed that behind Hafey said.

He closed the door behind him. He turned, ran down the hall to the front door and slammed that behind him, too.

Later, while he was hiking through cold, damp darkness along a state road which led back to town, he dropped the gun into his pocket.

"The toughest job little Bill Hafey ever handled," he muttered. "The toughest job in years, and not a lousy penny of pay."

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF MARCH 3, 1933, of Popular Detective, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1935.

County of New York { ss.
Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared N. L. Pines, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Publisher of Popular Detective, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business manager are:

Publisher, Beacon Magazines, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, G. B. Farnum, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, none; Business Manager, H. L. Herbert.

2. That the owner is: Beacon Magazines, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 22 West 48th Street, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagee, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none.

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N. L. PINES, Publisher.
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NOSED OUT

(Concluded from page 125)

And Ole was at the mill all day working.

"But"—Grantley's lips twisted in a mirthless grin—"I didn't have any evidence to back up my case. If Dorgan hadn't been guilty, he'd have realized that the bandanna would be dry now and the smell would have faded out."

He shoved his gun back into his holster. His voice was harsh as he spoke to the white-faced girl in Doc Giles' arms.

"Sorry I dragged you into this, Miss Forrester. But you said you wanted to see the murderer punished. You thought then that my stepfather was the killer—but I've tried to fulfill your wish for you. Now—I'm handing my star over to Duke Hollis—and I'm kicking loose from this damned town for keeps."

He started for the door, but halted as a soft voice called:

"Bob—Bob Grantley. Please don't go."

Resentment still blazed in his eyes as he turned to face her.

"I'm sorry I tried to make you—hurt your stepfather," Helen Forrester said shakily. "I guess I was pretty badly hurt myself. But you've showed that you are the kind of a man Centralia needs—as sheriff."

A swift smile softened his lips, lighting his boyish face as he gazed at her.

"I'm sorry, Helen," he said humbly. "I know how you felt about losing your father. I felt the same way, when it looked as if I'd have to lose John—the only dad I ever knew. Come on, girl—I'd better take you home."

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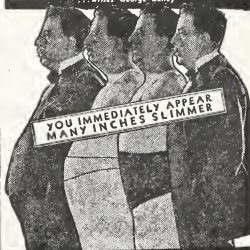
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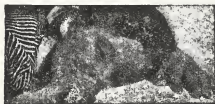
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THE NITWIT

(Concluded from page 118)

"Boys," he said, sadly, "you just haven't learned how things work. You can beat a dick like me, and you can beat the cops and the courts, but there's a kind of law you can't beat."

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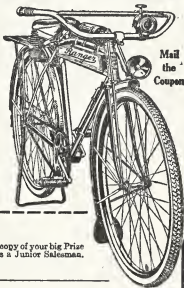
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Both of these ideas are all bunk—and I have PROVED it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my system of *Dynamosis Tension* can do for yours!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I used to be. Then I was a physical weakling—a 97-pound weakling—flat-chested, scrawny legs, arms like pipe stems.

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I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

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